Lemuria (& The Black Swan)

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Lemuria (& The Black Swan)

by Attic_Nights

Summary

Of late, Will's been having one night stands. Every night of the week, in fact. Trouble is, he can't remember anything prior to waking up in their beds. It's both frustrating and terrifying. Afraid he's jumped too far into the most recent killer's head, Will thinks it's only time before he wakes up next to a body of his own making. Enter Hannibal.

Notes

This started as a cracky idea with which to amuse myself. I don't know when that changed. Set after Will's release.

A note on the title: Lemuria (& The Black Swan)

Three times a year the gates to the underworld opened. During this, the Mundus Patet, the spirits emerged and communed with the living, wandering around the streets of ancient Rome. No public business could be contracted, no ships set sail, no battles fought, no armies levied, no marriage to take place. In contrast, May's festival of Lemuria sought to exorcise malevolent ghosts from their homes; its marriages were still considered unlucky.

I also wrote a huge meta based on Will's mental state during this, going well into science (and referencing actual journal articles sheesh i'm a nerd), but unless someone asks for it I'm not going to reproduce it here. I'm not diverging from/adding to the show, only expanding what is already there in canon. Basically, Will still has to deal with madness on a medical level. The reality/fantasy border blurs and switches. Thus excusing the following plot:

Mononoke

Before the fall his dogs stuck close to him. And in moments like this, he liked to think it was because they were grateful for him, that they loved having him back.

Under a yawning sun they padded out into a crisp, foggy Wolf Trap. Their gleaming coats refracted the pale pink dawn, their tongues lolling as they half-heartedly snuffled the foliage so changed from nighttime. Will watched them over a steaming mug, propped against a peeling support beam on his veranda. The coffee stung bitter, sharp; when the cup grew cold he threw it into the tree line. Brown liquid flew in an arc; there was no heavy thunk when it landed. He couldn't see where it ended up and that suited him just fine.

Except, Marlon dashed from under a fern and retrieved for him just the mug's handle, powder blue and unchipped except for a jagged porcelain edge. His face was so bright, his fangs so sharp, that Will thought perhaps Marlon should be the moon, if the moon too liked broken things. The border collie mix thumped his tail impatiently, and when Will stretched out his hand, a heavy cheek nuzzled him towards the sky.

There was a tapping in the kitchen, like someone was going through the cutlery draw, and it startled Will somewhat. He counted seven dogs, he counted himself, and, not wanting to look back inside, he continued to watch his pack. He swallowed and clenched his jaw. After all, there was never anyone there, not inside his house. Not anymore.

These days the screen door did crap all but slouch on its hinges, its metal rusted and abandoned. The deck itself had roughened, enough so that he would need to do something if he wanted to keep their paws free of splinters. But the dogs don't mind it yet, and the texture still felt alive under his bare feet. It bit, and he liked that.

When the sun slipped higher and his shoulders grew colder, the dogs slipped lower into the earnest spring grass, never straying far from his sight. Strewn about the yard, they looked at him, collectively, individually, as if to say *I'm bored*. There trod heavy hooves in the forest, the Ravenstag peering through the hemlocks. It was waiting, too.

Not bothering with socks, Will toed on his boots and stepped past the tree line. His pack swirled closer as the forest's dancing leaves submerged them; they leapt with eager eyes into the thick, crisp fog that had sunk into the morning valley like an ocean. Gypsy moths fluttered, disturbed from their oaks, smothering the air in grey. They swirled until all he could see in their wings was Garett Jacob Hobbs' eyes, his hair, all so grey and alive. A red dragonfly splattered his cheek, and he gasped.

Will cleared a dry creekbed, a fallen sapling, running now, his breath ghosting and ragged, his arms chilled and his chest hot. Branches stung his face, hemlocks grasping his legs. Dogs on his heels, they careened up sloping earth until, as one, they surged panting into the sun. He stumbled to a halt. Wolf Trap was visible from up here. Below, proud treetops struggled, their spidery crowns peeking through the gold-white air, moored by ancient roots in fertile soil. Rooftops became strange boats, while clouds of woolly dogs snuffled in and out of visibility.

Winston nudged the back of his knee, nose cold and ears slouched. They were all here, seven dogs and one man. No Garrett Jacob Hobbs, no Abigail, no Ravenstag. He leaned against a yew tree and sighed.

Then Beverly stepped into the sun, looking far too alive. He blinked at her. The dogs elected to sniff out a nearby rabbit warren.

He frowned, his heart slow. “You died.”

“Hello to you too.” She crossed her arms, her eyes searching. He avoided them. “Miss me?”

He nodded twice. “How was dying?”

“Rough. Lingering; two out of five stars, wouldn’t consider buying again.”

She raised a sardonic brow and he leaned away, just slightly. “Are you... staying?”

The wind rustled the branches above and dappled the sun. He wondered if she would be like his other ghosts, stitched together by shadows and moonlight.

A grin sharpened her flushed, dead cheeks. “You tell me, kiddo.”

The fall started with Jack claiming to have a present for Will.

“A nice one for you,” he said, stepping back to let Will peel back the caution ribbon.

“A nice murder? How kind, Jack.”

“Should be fairly straightforward. I’d bring Bloom in on it, but—”

“Nice to know I’m appreciated.”

The third level hallway of Paradise Towers was bursting with bodies. Alive ones, mind. Bustling, shuffling and pressing against Will’s personal space. The string bean wallpaper peeked through the suits now and again, and Will considered melting into it. It looked strong.

“Hi Will. Where’s Cheekbones?” Zeller brushed past them, all limbs, a bulky camera flash in wobbling precariously in hand. They’re all waiting for him, Will realized. Kept the scene untouched. It was like stepping into worn dress shoes. Formal, scuffed and needing a polish. He scrubbed at his beard and wondered if he should’ve shaved.

Jack answered for him, a rumble of disapproval in his voice. “Doctor Lecter’s away at a conference.”

Brushing aside a wayward lock of hair, Price passed a look to Zeller, who shrugged. They parted to reveal a burgundy door. The brass numbers of 34 glinted under fluorescent lights, and tacked from jamb to handle was another stalwart ribbon of police tape. The doorknob was cold, and then it was not.

“We’re looking at two other homicides that fit the pattern. North Carolina, Virginia, and now Maryland.”

Jack turned, a towering storm cloud. The hallway quietened and Will breathed.

Zeller recovered the quickest and, with a prod to Price, broke the silence. “Making this the third. How does ‘Praying Mantis’ sound?”

“The mantodea that eats its mate? A little tacky.”

“You think?”

Price moved his hands in a so-so gesture. “Yeah. I guess. What d’you think, Will?”

Will snapped the door open, caution ribbon fluttering to the floor, and they fell silent. He stepped inside alone, his careful footfalls muffled by blood-spattered carpet. It had been navy once, but time had rendered it faded and patched. He avoided a strewn vase; perched upon its blood-splintered glass was a daisy, wilted and gazing into the bedroom.

Will gazed into the bedroom too, and upon a king bed the dead eyes of the victim gazed back. His hair splayed like ink into the white pillows and work-blackened hands clutched the air around his still chest. He might have been called handsome in life, but death had leeched any glow from his dark skin.

Will squeezed his eyes shut and let the pendulum swing.

What was smashed became whole and the blankets curled around the slumbering figure. Slipping in next to him in the bed, Will faced the sleeping man.

“I wake up to you. But you are not what I want. You anger me.”

The man’s eyes flickered open, a pretty, pale green, when Will’s hands wrapped around his neck. He shoved him into the pillow, heedless of the hands scrabbling at his chest. His chest heaved in tandem with the writhing man. “I can control this,” Will panted. “I control this.”

It was painful. Tiring. Will squeezed tighter and something popped. The man stilled and Will reared backwards.

“I stumble into the hallway, knocking a vase from the bookshelf as I do so. I step on its splintered glass, barefoot, and it cuts me. There is nothing I can do about that, not now. Trailing blood, I limp to gather my shoes. My clothes. I slip outside, the blood trail ending at the threshold. My shoes hold my blood, my flesh. It is mine.”

Will resurfaced with a gasp. The air seemed to bite him, so he leaned against the doorframe for support.

“Jack.”

Footsteps, then forensics piled in. Will pressed himself against the wall, until Jack pulled him into the kitchenette, hand like a leash to a startled dog. A file got shoved into his chest, and Will doesn’t need to open them to know they’re from the other two crime scenes. Jack left him there, where he couldn’t be in the way, to oversee the CSIs.

A picture stared at Will, reclined on the coffee table and yellowed from the sun. A group shot, the victim beaming in a classroom. His students wore hi-viz aprons and safety goggles, some leaning on workbenches. They all surrounded him, smiling, pulling faces, their hammers and saws lofted high into the air.

The files rustled as he shuffled through them, and they were the same. A woman instead of a man in Virginia, but that control, or lack of it, wove iron thread through the photos. DNA, no current match. Two reports from two different profilers were tacked to the back, but they differed, and they were both wrong. Idle fingers tapped against the folder, but his mind struggled, sluggish and misted.

Jack returned to him, eventually.

“Talk to me.”

“I– I’m not sure. There’s a disruption in the flow. This isn’t a crime of passion. At least, not as we know it. Somewhere—” He cast his hands out in a linear projection. “Somewhere in this, between the sex and the killing, the purpose changes. It lacks fluidity.”

“Could it be two people? A lure and a killer?”

Price materialized behind Jack. “Preliminary forensics suggests otherwise. Just like the other scenes.” He waved a baggy containing strands of short red hair. “Otherwise, what would we call them? The ‘Fisherman’?

“Now who’s being tacky?” Zeller’s voice rose from the bedroom.

“Has no pizzazz,” Price agreed, a wry curve to his lips.

Jack waved for quiet, his bleak, thunderous façade focused on Will.

“Age? Race? Profession? Give me something to work with here.”

“I can’t be sure of anything yet, Jack.”

Will doesn’t stop thinking about the crime scene at the BAU, or on his lunch break, and his thoughts lingered still on the drive home.

The motorway was a mess from a flash storm, leaves and strips of bark slicking the asphalt, and the traffic slow was because of it. All he needed to do was guide the wheel and caress the pedals. It was automatic, leaving his mind free to wander. Streetlights blinked slowly, dipping in a golden arc until all he could see was his pendulum swinging, sweeping him back. Back to the broken things, the cold things, the ease in which Idris Hamad died. The shattered continuity of it all.

His cell hung heavy in his pocket, and for a moment, the thought roiled forth as sure as the ocean. Hannibal. He bit his lip, one hand hooked on the wheel, and stared at the florescent-stained horizon.

Then he rolled his eyes, because he didn't yet know how to play this. How to hook it - what lure to place in Hannibal's mouth and still avoid getting bit.

His phone vibrated for a call.

It's enough of a shock that he wondered if perhaps it didn't. But the buzzing continued, and he fished it from his jacket to quickly check the caller ID. He rolled his eyes again. Trust Hannibal to gaslight him without even being here. Sitting inside his head, so many strings plucked and played until Will was left in the surreal tangle of his own reality. The cell kept buzzing.

He indicated right and pulled into a roadhouse parking lot. Swinging into an empty spot bathed by a neon sign, Will answered the call.

"Doctor Lecter."

The other line crackled, a sharp inhale. "Hello Will."

He anchored himself against the steering wheel and still floated adrift. "How's Florida? A bit warmer than here, I'm guessing."

There was a brief pause, like Hannibal was as much surprised as Will that they were to discuss the weather.

"I have never quite adapted to humidity," Hannibal confessed. Will chewed the inside of his cheek.

"And the conference?"

"Regretfully unstimulating. Tomorrow offers a talk on the potential existence of ludic fallacy in diagnostic systems."

Will snorted. "Perhaps you should stay for the full week."

There was an amused pause. "Do you wish to reschedule our session for a later date?"

Will's chest deflated in a rush. He rolled his eyes when the silence continued. "No."

“Jack tells me you were at a crime scene today.” Of course he would. Dangle the lure with no hint of finesse. “Do you wish to talk about it?”

“Not particularly.”

“Then tell me what troubles you.”

“I am *troubled*,” he echoed, the word slicing through his breath, “because I stared at a killer and had no killer stare back at me.”

“You feel you could not connect with this person.”

Will nodded, then remembered rather abruptly that he was in his car, Hannibal a thousand miles away. He blinked. “There was no one to connect to.”

“And yet there was a murder.”

Will grunted in frustration. “A broken spider web. Prey cocooned in bed, a lure, a lack of control – but they were shattered fragments. No... continuity.”

“Are you avoiding empathizing with the perpetrator?” Will snorted derisively. Hannibal changed tack, his voice low and soothing. “If not empathy, perhaps you are not connecting with a killer because it is not a killer.”

“Three dead bodies and a pattern. There’s a killer in there somewhere.”

“A most fascinating conundrum then. Might I assist, in any way?” Silence fell, a thick and heavy fog; Will found its weight comforting. He listened to Hannibal’s breathing, steady and gentle, and timed his own to it.

“Is there something else, Will?”

He thought of the ghost back home, the singular, stubborn ghost. “No.”

Unbidden, his jaw clenched.

Mostly, Beverly looked like a normal person. Alive, breathing, with a slight flush to her cheeks and a sardonic bounce to her smile. It was only when she moved too fast that she became other – her body lagged behind her somewhat, the pieces sliding apart. It reminded Will (though he would never express the sentiment aloud) of the Microsoft cursor and the ‘trail’ option. Otherwise, she was still mostly whole and stared at him with too-aware eyes.

The night before he’d spent in a pile of dogs with a tumbler of Jack. Had one too many tumblers, admittedly, his body relaxing with every sip and wishing his mind would quiet in the same way. She’d buzzed about the house, as she had taken to doing, and he’d ignored her. Like he always did, was wont to do, when she moved too fast and reminded him that she was indeed shattered.

“Aren’t you a sight for sore eyes?” The dead woman had said, swiping some dust from the windowpane. She pulled her hand back, disgust wrinkling her face. He groaned when she

waggled dust-stuck fingers in front of him, and she had laughed.

His head had lolled back until a tiny paper crane came into view. Nestled small on his bookshelf, between a leash and his laptop. He stared at it for a few minutes, Ginger's drooling chin rested on his knee, when the ghost stopped, towering over him and yet looking so small.

("Only paper," they'd said in the prison. Beverly, sweet, then-alive Beverly exploited a loophole and passed through, nestled among official documents, a finely crafted black paper crane. She'd called it a swan – black, because of their kin in Australia. *It was a nice place, Australia*, she'd mused. Though she did think the swans looked more scruffy than their white kin. "Like you," she'd teased.)

He'd put down the bottle then, and let her pull him to his wardrobe. Let her help him cull his clothes and shine his shoes. Left this morning with the sound of her rifling through his kitchen, complaining about his lack of finesse in the culinary department, ringing in his ears.

"Will?" Hannibal's voice trickled through the speaker.

Of course Hannibal would notice the delay in his answer, though the pause couldn't have been more than a few seconds. He rubbed a hand against his forehead, his thoughts racing down murder highway.

"Sorry. No." He tried to think of a plausible lie. Inspiration struck him upon seeing an unfamiliar redhead dismount from a motorcycle a few spaces down. Her curling locks bounced free from her helmet, and her sober face was lined. "I'm trying to avoid our Lady Lazarus."

Beware beware, out of the ash I rise, with my red hair...

Hannibal was quiet for a moment. Will could almost hear the click as the reference slots into place. Honestly, he was a little surprised that Hannibal would read Plath. Then again, with such dark and beautiful words, perhaps he shouldn't be. "Is Freddie Lounds troubling you?

"And I eat men like air." He murmured, trying to think of a way to describe Freddie and not expedite her being eaten. He grabbed hold of the first thought that sparked through his synapses. "Wants an interview."

"Best not let her consume you, then." (No, all yours, comes the errant thought)

"I'll see you at our next session, Doctor Lecter."

Hannibal took it as the closure it was. "I'm here for you. Goodnight Will."

Rain started to tap at his windshield again, the last cough of a dead storm. Clutching the darkened screen of his cell, Will closed his eyes and let the pendulum fall.

He woke slowly, and then all at once.

The pillow under his head was fluffy, and from the wrong angle did the light edge in. The only sounds were of his breathing, unnaturally loud, and the distant warble and creak of a mockingbird. The musk of sex hung in the air.

A warm, heavy body laid beside him.

It turned, and something inside him gasped in relief.

Who are you?

He cracked his eyes open to skin as pale as mist.

The stranger blinked back at him with brown eyes set high in a round face. He swallowed, unmoving, and noted there was something sweet in the way her rosy smile blossomed. She yawned.

“Morning," she greeted. "*Good* morning, I should say.” She sat up, chestnut curls spilling across her breast. “Wow, last night... if I make pancakes, what do you say to round three? At his dumbfounded look, the woman frowned. “You like pancakes, right?”

Will unfroze.

He stumbled out of bed, grabbing his strewn clothes while she trailed after him with hurt brown eyes, naked as Venus. The threshold nearly tripped him, his bare arms pimpling in the cruel morning air.

He paused for a moment, her mailbox, bright and red, catching his attention. His eyes flickered over to note the street sign, sprouting from a rhododendron a little way down - Pemrose Lane.

Without thinking, the first thing he did after falling through his car door with his flies undone and shoes still unlaced, was ring Hannibal.

Yuki-onna

Chapter by not_my_shell (Attic_Nights)

Chapter Summary

> *[Speaking into a dictaphone]* North ceiling corner, cobwebs containing a number of deceased arachnids... with beans.
>
> Will wakes up to a ghost, a cannibal, and a dead man. (Also known as Will is his own biggest cock blocker ever.)

Chapter Notes

> I've just got to preface this chapter (probably should have done it beforehand) by saying this fic is a Gordian knot of consent issues. Like, I don't even know if there are laws for this. Breaks my mind thinking about it. Some sections are more morally grey than others, but except for one instance, no one is touched when, in that moment of touching, they don't want to be touched.
>
> Also, my old laptop died, so this chapter hasn't been as rigorously checked as I would like (but I thought I'd keep to schedule anyway, post it as promised, and check it a few times a bit more leisurely.)

Outside, the sky was burning. Ash fell like snow from an impaled horizon, pale grey against shimmering orange.

But inside, on the dog hair upholstered couch was curled a ghost. She bathed under the glow of a wildlife documentary, her chest gently rising and falling with the calm cadence of life. Will stared down at her, amusement prickling the corners of his mouth. He wasn't sure why he should be amused, but it felt right. He forwent sitting with the dead and leaned against the backrest instead.

"There nothing else on?" he asked.

"As a general rule I don't like movies," answered the ghost.

"Why?"

She shrugged, her jaw twitching. Buster padded up to her and jumped on her lap. Will watched her pet him with gentle scratches behind his ear. His fur seemed to react to the movements.

“It’s weird. Like, really weird. But... movies have a start and an end. Stories, too. Everything’s important, nothing goes to waste – not if it’s meant to be *good.* If there’s a gun mentioned in the first act, it’s fired in the third. And so on. And we’re watching these people with lives so like our own, in a relatable sense, and for them everything happens for a reason. There’s a big picture in there, a story arc. There’s fate, where those pawns fall for the king to be saved. So does that mean everything happens for a reason in life? No. There’s no king. We’re all pawns.”

“You find it unrealistic?”

“After the game is finished, both king and pawn go into the same box. Death is death. But we can’t do that as humans; we make connections. We think, if that guy has something good happen more than another, it’s because of who he is. That he deserves it. It’s there as a calmative, the sense of narrative flow. This structure we follow, take comfort in, is because it will all work out fine. So in the big world when the zebra gets eaten we can believe it to have meaning. That it pushes forward the narrative. But when one someone tells a story about, say, the holocaust? How can they justify that it was all for some big picture? Meant to happen? You can’t. Not in a traditional sense. There’s nothing calming there. Once you know it’s all shit, you can’t justify taking the great narrative prescription.” She crossed her arms in a defensive gesture. “So I don’t like movies.”

“I take it you don’t believe in god.”

“If one exists, they’re a shit storyteller.”

“So the zebra dies.”

“Sometimes. Sometimes not. There’s nothing predictable about it, no placating script, because it’s real. The zebra's continued life holds no more profound meaning than if it died.”

“Not for the zebra.”

“Only for the zebra.”

Quiet fell for a little while, Buster snuffling in his sleep, and Will watched one of the zebras escape only to watch its foal get eaten. Big bloody chunks torn from its ragdoll neck like crepe paper. It left the same impression of Hannibal at his harpsichord – of something beautiful, but raw. “If it’s not there as a calmative, why do you watch it?”

“To learn.”

“You’re already dead, Beverly.”

“Never said I was a good student, bucko.”

Will frowned. There was a slight scratching noise, an itch in his ear. Scraping so softly, complemented with the steady softness of breath. “Are you… drawing?”

She frowned at him.

For a split second the television flickered. It caught his imagination, and for a moment it twisted in his mind until he saw Hannibal, calm, with his eyes closed and a faint smile warming his mouth.

Beverly’s voice shook. “I think he’s trying to get your attention.”

“Who?”

Will’s eyes flicked open and he jerked upright, finding himself horizontal.

Beverly was gone. His bed was digging into his back and Winston was warm between his legs. Marlon had transfigured into a fuzzy rug around rich brown brogues, unconcerned and snoozing. Noticing he was awake, Bette batted her big eyes, thumped her tail and lolled her tongue over her prominent overbite. The rest of his pack were not in his line of sight, but he could hear them playing outside. Inside rich brown brogues, Hannibal sat reclined on a chair beside him, casual in a white open necked suit.

Will swore.

“Good afternoon, Will.”

Hannibal took the time to finish whatever he was shading, scraping graphite over marbled paper, before he secreted the small sketchbook away in his breast pocket. It blended in with the lines of his suit, and Will swallowed, feeling strangely vulnerable. Then he looked down at himself, and realized he was naked. His lower half stuck to a single white sheet, his chest bared and pebbled, and he thought perhaps vulnerability was not so strange after all. Behind his eyelids flashed belated impressions of him standing under the showerhead until it spluttered cold, his shaking hands dragging laundry soap over and over pink skin. He’d hurled his shivering bones into bed, but he doesn’t remember falling asleep.

Feeling unclean, he tugged thoughtfully at the sheet pooled in his groin, but did not raise it higher.

“Florida?”

Hannibal inclined his head, his eyes shining with amusement. “The conference is not so important.”

“So you decided to break into my house?”

“I apologize. You were not answering your phone and your door was unlocked. Would you like some food?”

Will shook his head, and tried to be as unbothered by his nakedness as Hannibal. He gestured to Hannibal’s chest. “Were you drawing your reckoning?”

Hannibal uncrossed his legs and leaned forward. The sketchbook he produced with a flourish, handing it to Will as if it were a knife being held out by the handle, the sharp blade pointing to the doctor's heart. Will accepted it cautiously.

The first few pages are lines of movement, impressions of song. They curved warily like Abigail's smile used to, and Will moved on. The other pages were streetscapes. Europe, probably, judging from the prevalence of medieval and gothic architecture, the careful detail to cobblestone streets. Drafts with technical lines, little or no true salience, their vectors mechanical.

Hannibal watched him, a gleeful tilt to his cheeks.

"Would you have preferred that I was?" he inquired as Will handed it back.

Will shrugged, hoping to cover the warmth that stained his cheeks and neck. "They need trees."

Hannibal sniffed, and for a moment Will thought he'd offended him. "The coffee is ready. Would you like a cup?"

The doctor rose, dislodging Marlon, and Will tried not to feel small, or glance antsily at the chest of drawers where his underwear was kept.

As soon as Will was alone, he made to dash to the drawers. Bright lights sparked his vision and his legs fell like jelly to the floor. Swearing, he managed to pull the sheet to cover his lap, and waited, propped against the bed, blinking until his sight returned. Winston whined at him, nuzzling his hair with his cold wet nose. He didn't hear Hannibal step back into his room, but he did smell the coffee.

Light shimmered gradually back into his eyes; Hannibal was watching him but otherwise did not move – an expressionless marble statue. Will frowned at him.

"You weren't drugged, at this point or in the last day, but you haven't eaten," he finally said, in response to Will's thoughts.

"Smell my hunger, can you?" His stomach rumbled and he blushed.

Hannibal's lips twitched minutely, and he extended to Will a Tinkerbelle mug. "You should have taken up my offer of food."

The coffee was his, but it tasted good for once. Smooth, strong and warm. Will stared into it, suspicious. "Food."

Hannibal stripped off his suit jacket and hung it in Will's wardrobe. Rolling his sleeves to his elbows, he revealed a jewel-red apple. Into its side he stuck a scalpel, using it to cut a swirling pattern into white flesh, skin neatly peeling away. He cored and quartered it just as deftly.

Will popped an offered slice into his mouth and broke its beautiful patterning with his teeth. He chewed, letting sweet and tart juices burst over his tongue, and swallowed. Like the

coffee the apple was his. Bought from a gas station and forgotten about until now.

“So I say I fucked something and you come running.”

Will wished he could say he saw a flash of ire in Hannibal’s dark eyes. A savage twitch in his jaw, a baring of his leonine teeth. If there were any of these, any symptoms of control and desire, he’d missed it. Hannibal gave nothing in his impassive stare, his palms facing upwards and open. Will tugged himself upwards to the bed’s edge and crossed his legs.

“Do you wish to talk about her, Will?”

“If you insist,” he drawled. Hannibal stayed blank. “Pretty, young. Pale as the moon with a face just as round. Had a cat and a mathematics degree, both on a piano in her lounge room.” He studied his hands and licked his lips before meeting Hannibal’s eyes. “I don’t remember how she tasted. How wet she was. How she felt under me, whether she writhed or rode. I don’t even remember her name. If it was even given. If she ever screamed mine.”

Calm eyes blinked, a shadow passing over the sun. “Do you wish to go to the police?”

“And why would I go to the police?”

“It is my duty to remind victims of sexual assault that there are legal channels that can and should be pursued.”

Legal channels. Somehow those words fell disingenuously from Hannibal’s lips. “She didn’t assault me. She didn’t *know* I wasn’t me. If anyone assaulted anyone, it was me to myself.

Hannibal pursed his lips. “So you disassociated.” ‘Again’ hung in the air. “How does that make you feel?”

He crunched into the remaining apple.

Low hanging fruit, he nearly reminded. Psychiatric clichés. The words died on his lips, because perhaps it meant the good doctor was as unsettled as he. Will relaxed. “Like I’m clawing through a darkness that isn’t there.”

“There is calm in darkness, should you seek comfort in it.”

“There’s a calmness in insanity, too.” He huffed out a laugh. “If the dark had teeth, they would be just as hidden as yours. And you would smile just the same.”

If Hannibal was pleased he hid it well. Oh, what a game they played. Both hunting the other, wondering at the shadows at their backs, not knowing from which angle the light was cast.

“Perhaps the dark smiles with you, Will.”

“Is that bread baking?”

Hannibal blinked at the non sequitur. “When you are ready, perhaps you can join me in your kitchen.”

The doctor almost bowed at him as he rose, white trousers falling creaseless into his shoes. Will rose too, his legs steady now, and dressed to the sounds of Hannibal in his kitchen. He did little more than throw on an old tee and boxers, fondly reminded of their first meal, of protein scramble, delicate cups and a mongoose.

Hannibal had laid the table with mismatched plates and cups, two handkerchiefs repurposed into napkins. In the table's center, a foxglove unfurled from a bottle of jack, one that must have been fished from his recycling. He rolled his eyes at Hannibal's passion for symbolism – digitalis and 40% proof, each both poisons in their own right. He cast wary eyes out for meat, for sautéed gas attendants, for accountant quiche Lorraine. The oven door screeched open, Hannibal's shirt rippling over his back as he bent to retrieve something.

"Do you have a bread knife, Will?" he asked, straightening from the knees.

Will blinked. "I have a serrated knife. I use it for fish."

Two slouched, slightly blackened loaves slid from Will's pizza pan onto a chopping board.

"Mola salsa," informed Hannibal, using the mentioned knife to cleave the flat bread. "A salted flour cake served during the feast of Lemuria by the Vestals of Ancient Rome. Ground with the season's first ears of spelt, salt purified it, as it was often crumbled onto the heads of sacrifices. But burned, it was an offering to the gods."

The bread was positioned into a fan shape, and around it Hannibal spiraled a passata sauce. Colorful beans of crimson, ivory and emerald were coaxed high in the center of their mismatched plates.

"You made this in my kitchen?" He wished he could have seen it, because he can't imagine it. An image rose unbidden, swirling and abstract as the first lines in Hannibal's sketchbook, of an antlered thing oiling about his kitchen.

"Yes." Hannibal caught his eyes, electric and burning, before continuing. "The restless dead, the ghosts of the city, were propitiated with offerings of beans. A simple dish, designed to exorcise phantoms and hearten the living."

They sat down, and Will gave a tentative bite. The dogs surrounded them, eager for scraps.

Hannibal paused, as if weighting his next words. "Considering recent events, I thought it might comfort you if I prepared something vegan."

"Vegan?" The word tasted funny in his mouth.

"Vegan."

"Pity. You make such beauty out of dead things, Hannibal."

Hannibal shifted, an unimpressed expression flickering over the set of his shoulders. Will swallowed, feeling rude.

He made eye contact again, forcing himself still. "Thank you. You didn't have to do this."

Something flickered across Hannibal's face, minute and fleeting, as if he were about to speak, but reconsidered. (*I want to. Need to,* the thought came unbidden, rattling around in Will's head.)

"What are friends for?"

The sun had died in a gasp of red by the time they finished, bellies full and soap suds sticking to Will's forearms. There was a streak of flour in Hannibal's hair when the doctor turned back from wiping the bench. Will's eyes fluttered downwards, his cheeks strangely hot, and was surprised to see the beginnings of an erection breaking the perfect ivory lines of Hannibal's pants. He stepped forward curiously, held in Hannibal's soft regard.

"Am I dreaming?"

Hannibal moved slowly into his space and inhaled. "You have a fever, Will."

"I'll take an aspirin."

"I recommend a doctor's touch." Hannibal's hand rose towards his forehead, then stopped to wait for permission.

Will scoffed and stepped backwards to dry his hand on a ratty tea towel. "Then I'll see a doctor." Maybe.

"I'm a doctor."

He laughed. "And you took *such* good care of my encephalitis. No offense – I think I'll pass."

Hannibal breathed slowly, as offended as a cat who'd had his exposed belly ignored. He stood tall, smoothing imaginary creases from ivory trousers and used their height discrepancy to stare down at Will.

"You have suffered a form of sexual assault. Coupled with your disassociation, it would be in your best interests for me to examine you."

Will swallowed. Hannibal's hand descended to his shoulder, warm and steady.

"Would you like me to stay?" asked Hannibal.

"Shit, you've still got your luggage in the car, don't you?" Hannibal stayed silent and Will shook his head. "No. I'll see a doctor tomorrow."

The man relaxed somewhat at this, the stern lines of his suit flexing. "I will drive you. My coming back early means my tomorrow is free."

"I can drive myself," Will argued, more to push the point than for the point to be taken.

Hannibal smiled, a small thing. "You shouldn't be driving when so tired."

“I’ll probably go straight onto Quantico after.”

“Then I will drive you there, too.”

“And back?”

“Like I said, my day is yours, Will. Call me when you make your appointment.”

The notion doesn’t escape him; if he was to catch Hannibal, fostering friendship was as good a step as any. “Is this what friends are for, Hannibal?”

Hannibal flashed a little teeth. “I am always yours.”

Will hadn’t been bothered to switch on the lights, the moonless night plunging into his house with even more vigor than usual. His dogs nested in their blankets, twitching and whuffling, the occasional slumbered claw scraping along the floorboards. Beverly slouched into him on the couch, basking in the glow of *The Sentinel* reruns. Unfortunately the ghost was still far too real, her fantastic nature straddling his propensity for fantasy to warp and woo the solid air of reality.

He pinched himself - still awake. Though the challenge to stay alert, at least past lockout time at the bars, was growing harder.

Blair’s voice rose from the screen, loud and indignant. *“Wait a minute, both of us?”*

The man on the screen – Brackett, perhaps his name was – shrugged. “*Well, you're his guide, so to speak, so I'll need you too.”*

The Ravenstag breathed over Will’s neck and he shuddered.

Beverly pulled a face. “Why is that big-ass moose here anyway?”

“He just is.”

Will woke up in a strange bed with a dead man.

Idris Hamad of Paradise Towers seemed to slumber but for his unmoving chest. Will blinked and realized his mistake; instead of splayed hair it was skin that was dark as ink, this man’s hair cropped close to a broad forehead. A broken nose was the only thing that broke the symmetry of his face, and there, through full lips, trembled soft gusts of air.

Will rolled onto his back, perturbed. The ceiling was ashen and spiders dangled in filigree webs. Incense and candles littered the open bowels of a second hand chest of drawers, and never, even in his days of cold hotdog sandwiches and a drunken father, had he ever seen a living space so small. He breathed in and wondered if he breathed any further if the walls would burst. The thought was comforting, enough for him to turn back to his…

The stranger's eyes fluttered open, dark brown instead of pale green.

"Where am I?" Will asked, then as an aside he added, "Hi."

"My place." Worry wrung the man's face. Will felt grateful for it – nothing so banal as worry had crossed Hannibal's face of late. "Picked you up sleepwalking down the 676. You remember, right?"

"Yeah," Will lied. His feet were sorer than his ass and dick, so he thinks he hasn't been fucked, or fucked – or at least he reckons not, and for that he was grateful. He inhaled the stink of sweat and come, and his eyes idly alighted on a condom pooled in the trash. Scratching lazily at his stomach, itchy from dried release, he asked, "This a habit for you?"

"No! No man, I mean. I never, and I was off duty anyway." He fiddled with the bedspread, embarrassed. "I haven't even come out yet."

"At least you're gay," muttered Will. He stretched out and wondered which part of his subconscious decided it was a bright idea to sleep with a man. He frowned at paisley wallpaper.

"It's Jason. Y'know. In case you forgot. S'okay." The shrug to his shoulders spoke of a man expecting to be forgotten.

Joints cracked as Will extended himself, preparing to extricate his body from this strange bed. He inhaled sharply as his back crunched, a spring digging into the back of his knee.

Jason swore. "You look spread thin as a gnat's whisker. Stay if you like."

Will thought about it. Sinking into the over-soft mattress, swaddling himself in blankets and never wakening again. Instead, he rubbed at his scratchy eyes and rolled out of the boy's bed. He landed on a beat cop's blues, a sharp belt sticking into the heel of his hand, and muttered a curse.

"Can I see you again?" asked the cop.

Will found his second sock wedged between a radiator and a battered copy of *Emma.* He leaned against a paisley wall to tug it on. His hand came away ashen, so he wiped it on his trousers when he shimmied them on.

Jason remained where he was, swaddled in bed. He ran nervous hands through his cropped hair, and asked, "There's a new coffee place, been meaning to check out. Wanna come sometime?"

“No,” Will said, and thought of Hannibal. Perhaps it was time to make that doctor’s appointment. The doorknob burned cold in his hand. "Uh, I know this is awkward, but do you think you can give me a ride home?"

Hitodama

Chapter by not_my_shell (Attic_Nights)

Chapter Summary

> Will makes a doctor's appointment. Hannibal arrives at Wolf Trap to see a shirtless, wet Will trying to wash his dogs. Of course. Also, picnics, jealousy and, looming in the future, a broken date.

Chapter Notes

> I love how Hannibal lends itself to pretentious writing. I've had so much fun with this. Although, I must have rewritten this chapter about three times. This is also the point where I got too far into researching medical stuff, but alas dear reader unless you specifically want it I won't bore you with the details.
>
> Also, if you see any mistakes, feel free to let me know!

“Dragging ass like a boomtown whore? I might get jealous.”

Will didn’t need to look at Beverly to know the ghost was teasing, her words light as her soul as he stared at the devastation that was once his dogs. They greeted him at the doorway, eyes bright and tails lofted high, their fur matted with something dark and slick. At first he thought it was blood, that they’d killed someone, something, until Winston wiped his nose on his pants. It was wet, greasy. Oil, likely from one of his boat motors. He frowned and pushed through the pack, studying his house. The motors were either outside in the shed, or secured in the upstairs bedroom. He tried his back door, and noticed it wasn’t clasped shut.

“How did you even get out?” he mused, squeaking the screen back and forth. Buster decided it a game, weaving in and out until Will almost closed the door on him. The small dog scampered inside to press against his ankles.

“I let them out.”

“You’re not real.” Will eyed Beverly with suspicion, lingering on a spot on her neck, where he could almost see her seams. She shrugged and leaned against a doorjamb. No, he decided it was more likely he hadn’t latched the door right.

“Could it have been robbers?” She frowned, pivoting, body scattering like loose petals from a spun rose. “Huh,” she said from inside the living room. “They took the TV.”

He sighed and started gathering dog food in the kitchen. He wasn’t sure when they’d last eaten, and if he wanted to shower, dress and get ready for Hannibal, he’d have to hurry. “I don’t have a television.” He paused, raw ground mince grasped in his hand, because something was clicking into place. “We were watching… before,” he realized. “Wildlife, the Sentinel. But the TV’s broke, I threw it out… three summer’s ago? Were we, was I dreaming?”

“Your laptop?” she suggested, swinging her legs on the kitchen table.

“No,” he gritted his teeth and carried the food outside.

She sighed, acknowledging it. “Are you mad?” He looked at her out of the corner of his eye. From the slant of her neck, she was expecting a reprimand.

He turned away, deflated. “Looks that way.”

He fed his dogs on the porch, eyes squinting at the low sunlight. Ginger woofed happily around a mouthful of meat, scraps and kibble, her ruddy matted fur spiky grass. She stopped mid meal to lick at a grease spot, and he leapt forward, pulling her nose away. He tousled her soft, loose-skinned neck.

“Suppose I’d have to wash you guys, huh?”

Beverly was useless when it came to rounding up the pack. Once the hose turned on, they scattered like perpetual blood splatter from an arterial wound. Only Winston grudgingly offered himself up; the morning was warm, but the hose was cold, and Will didn’t much blame the pack for fleeing. Beverly, meanwhile, laughed raucously as Marlon slipped through his soaked arms for the third time, leaving him to fall headfirst into the grass. She did help him by gathering towels, leaving a mismatched stack for him on the porch. He stared at them suspiciously, lingering on two towels of pretty green and bottleglass blue. They reminded him of the case, of dead eyes and smashed vases, and he felt a line furrow between his brows.

Beverly noticed, of course she did, and sat beside him, almost transparent in the sunlight. She cast thin beams of shadow where she was severed, leaving behind a barcode of friendship. He wondered what he ever did to cash that friendship in.

“I’ll see it eventually.”

“Ever think it’s because you’re repressing yourself?” she asked, sitting on her hands.

“Hannibal said the same thing.” Marlon shivered, hugged tight and trusting to his now bare chest, his clammy tee abandoned for quick-drying flesh.

“Then maybe he’s got a point, since I’m apparently in your subconscious and I’m bringing it back.”

Will glanced at her, a soiled paw pinched between his fingers.

“Hannibal's point about repression," she clarified. “Though I do know all the lyrics to SexyBack.”

“Screw you.”

“Charmer.” She affected a whiny, singsong voice. “I’ll let you whip me if I misbehaave.”

“*I* don’t even know all the lyrics.”

“Funny that, isn’t it?” She leaned forward, almost as if to touch the border collie mix, but instead swung her legs on the step, as if that was what she was always going to do. “What I mean is you barely use your empathy anymore. You got so burned- “

“Because I was blind. I walked into that fire smelling smoke, trusting orange and red as the only indicator for an inferno.”

“Remember when I spoke to you down the firing range?”

He laughed at the non-sequitor, and grabbed a towel to scrub at Marlon. “Weaver stance.”

“Weaver stance.” She smiled. “I asked why you felt you needed to practice your shooting when you were not official FBI.”

“You thought I was just some profiler and teacher. Cushy.”

“No I didn’t, and you know that. Just like you didn’t ask me why, too.”

“Why does a lab rat know how to shoot?”

“You know the answer.” He raised his eyebrows, prompting her to continue. “You saw it in me. You didn’t stop your empathy then.”

He conceded her point, remembering stepping inside her skin as she had corrected his stance. He swallowed, dry. “Couldn’t switch it off.”

“Now you can?”

He fell silent, and she was too. Then,

“Everyone needs to let loose.”

“Is that your way of saying I need the casual... sex?”

She laughed. “Good a relief as anything, Willy.”

He had plowed through the pack, and was trying to coax the last one, Bette, from under the settee, when a light rap came at the door.

Their lives were so often constructed with simile and metaphor, their breath of fireflies and their pain as raw as grass, that something shattered inside Will to see Hannibal standing

before him as a man, a man not of shadow and tendrils of string, but one that breathed, felt, just whole and complete. It was enough to take his breath away, that aching realization inside his chest, to see him in his doorway, with the soft sunlight falling over his sharp cheekbones and the shadows he cast there not because he could, but because he simply did. There were dog hairs wafting onto his shoulders, sticking to the hems of his pants, and his leather shoes anchored a hundred and eighty pounds of flesh to Will's claw-marked pinewood flooring. Right this instance, a meteor could crash into his house and leave naught but a crater where two mortal men once stood. It doesn't, but reality still left a scorching sting on his cheek.

He could see it all, and above all, he could see him. Hannibal was vulnerable, and Will trembled for having never seen a prettier thing.

"Hello, Will," greeted Hannibal, calm and soothing as a boat upon water, but before he could get much further he was stopped. The dogs were still half wet and now half muddied, too, despite his desperate attempts to shut them inside until their fur dried. They swarmed around Hannibal, tails wagging and mouths drooling, looking rather like a load of dirty rags circling the washing machine. A shaggy, earnest möbius strip.

He appeared equal parts enchanted and lost, and Will acknowledged they probably looked even uglier than usual.

"These are probably dogs," Will explained.

Hannibal stood unmoving in a soft burgundy sweater, almost casual for him, but the suit it below was more of his usual fare. Forest green pinstriped trousers encased lean legs, and around his neck poked the collar of his shirt, eggshell paisley shimmering almost invisible against creamy white linen. His throat was bare, and when he shed his pea coat, the fabric pulled taut to reveal the hollow between two finely curved clavicles.

"You can leave your stuff on, I just need to change."

Hannibal tilted his head, almost imperceptibly. Though his face was blank as ever, something in it caused Will to realize he must smell. Like wet dog, nightmares, and another man's come.

Swallowing, Will finally grasped a wriggling Bette as she tried to make a break for it. He held the dog in explanation and tried not to duck his head. "I'll bathe her, then myself. Make yourself comfortable, Doctor, though I'd avoid the settee. Unless you appreciate the dog hair aesthetic."

Some teen pop music bleated around the small waiting room, half covered by the various sounds of liquids oozing and spluttering from the various orifices of the waiting room patrons. Hannibal was sitting very still, as he had for the past hour, every line in him tense, his eyes locked upon a poster that had an elephant advertising rectal thermometers. A child no older than four stumbled, its sticky hand accidentally grabbing Hannibal's knee, and left

behind a moist spot. Seeing this, Will barely suppressed a smile, even as the doctor shifted minutely at the sight of the spot.

Hannibal's eyes flicked up as Will walked towards him, a script tight in his hand. "All done, Will?" He shifted slightly in his seat, thousand dollar pants mingling with five dollar upholstery. "You were in there only a few minutes."

"Yeah, said it's just migraines." Doctor Li had also offered to write a referral to a psychiatrist, to which he had laughed heartily. To appease Hannibal, who had risen to stand far too close, he let him see the prescription, staring himself at a spot on the doctor's jaw. He basked under the familiar warmth that emanated through their layers.

Hannibal's tone was disapproving as he perused the script. "This is for an analgesic. Did they even take your temperature?"

Will rolled his eyes, snatching the paper back while Hannibal distracted himself in purloining the doctor's business card from the nurses' desk. He was beginning to remember why Hannibal was such a *bad* idea. "I'll just get it made up."

"Will," he said, once they'd made it to the Bentley. "We may go to a pharmacy but I must recommend a different form of treatment."

Will scoffed.

"Such a dire way to kill me – or are you hoping to mold me again?"

Hannibal retrieved a briefcase from his boot and produced his own set of prescription forms. He uncapped a fountain pen and wrote upon it in serpentine words.

"You have a fever and medical history of encephalitis. I would not be so thoughtless as to let you be dealt the same cards twice."

His words were careful enough not to affirm his mistreatment last time, but Will accepted it as an admission anyway. He'd be a fool to fall for the same tricks twice, and Hannibal would be a fool to try them. He felt eyes bore into his head, and ignored the blushing fondness that rose from it.

"Can you even do this?" he muttered instead, as if writing prescriptions for friends was more unethical than cannibalism.

Hannibal smiled.

The pharmacist took both scripts with barely a blink, gum almost unnoticeable in her mouth.

He nodded at Hannibal's one. "What is it?"

“It’s a strong antibiotic.”

“Side effects?”

She paused for a moment. Sighing, she tapped at her computer screen. “Rare chances of nausea, diarrhea, vomiting, a red rash…”

“No chance of psychosis?”

She eyed him carefully, gum rolling from one side of her mouth to another. “No. Why d’you ask?”

“And this dosage, it looks… right?”

“Yeah, think so.” She twitched out a wry smile. “So long as you're not... You’re not pregnant, I’m guessing?”

“Oh,” he said. “No. Okay.”

By the Bentley, Hannibal waited for him with the sun haloing his silvering hair in gold. As he approached, Will fixed his eyes on the normally neat locks, which were ruffled like feathers by a teasing wind, and thought perhaps Hannibal had used minimal pomade for just such an effect. Silently, Hannibal pivoted on the pavement to open the passenger door for him.

“Will?”

The voice was not Hannibal’s, thrown out across the lot, and Will spent embarrassing seconds placing it. He turned, Hannibal tall against his back.

In acknowledgement, he inclined a mortified hand towards Jason, who had stopped writing a ticket for a car parked in handicap without a sticker. His one night stand ambled over, face bathed in sun.

“I just realized,” Jason began, a smile bouncing alongside his steps, “I know where you live, but not your phone number.”

“That…” Will paused, feeling rather than seeing the dark antlered thing transform at his back. “Is correct.”

Jason seemed to just then take in the looming presence behind Will. “Hi! I met Will the other night. Jason.”

He offered hand to Hannibal. Hannibal accepted it after the briefest pause - taking it from his place behind Will, his only accession a step forward, which merely cleaved him closer to the empath.

Stupid boy.

Will fiddled with his designer scarf, hot under the midday sun. He cast his eyes to the pavement rather than any faces, and calmly watched the Wendigo’s antlered shadow claw

towards the beat cop.

“This is Hannibal.”

The shadow retracted somewhat, sharp antlers blossoming into leaves. The leaves turned sharp and wicked, coiling protectively around his shoes. Will frowned, and wondered why he hadn’t just called him Doctor Lecter.

Jason seemed to stumble somewhat, hands twitching nervously, as if he sensed danger but not its form.

“I am often pleased to meet Will’s acquaintances.” Hannibal’s hand came to rest on Will's shoulder, warm and familiar. “Perhaps you should join us for dinner, sometime.”

Jason took a step backwards. “Perhaps,” he allowed in a hollow voice. “I best get back to work – it was nice seeing you again, Will.”

“Maybe some other time,” he responded, just to feel Hannibal squeeze his shoulder, just slightly.

He turned regard Hannibal’s face, black and velveteen despite the golden sunlight. Heart thudding in his chest, he swallowed, staring at the gaunt angles of the Wendigo’s cheeks, and the thought struck him of how like darkness it was, familiar and peculiarly enchanting. Calming. He allowed the blackened hand to guide him into his seat, steady against the small of his back, and smiled at the beast only for the beast to turn away.

Will sat cross-legged in a park with Hannibal, feeling strangely lonely.

He raised his eyebrows. “Come back to me?”

In response, Hannibal gifted him a flute of orange juice, poured with a flourish from a stainless steel flask. He accepted it, even as the doctor busied himself with plating a lavish spread of pastries and fruit. Light dappled over sure fingers and small flowers. They moved in a silent dance, stark against the loud wrens twittering among the bowed branches of a shading maple. It was a school day, with only the wind playing with the park's rusting swing set.

Will buried his nose in his glass, trampling out the scent of pollution from a nearby road.

“One is meant to hold it by the stem.”

Will covered his startled twitch with a smooth movement towards a pomegranate. He lofted the flute of orange juice in evidence.

“It’s fragile,” he argued.

“That is how it must be, Will.” Hannibal’s features softened, and his eyes dropped.

Will swallowed painfully, trembling. “I thought I had killed him.”

“Jason?” Will nodded, glad the moment was broken. “The latest case appears to be affecting you. How did you know you did not?”

”I saw her victim, the killer’s victim first. He was so still. But then he moved.”

Hannibal sunk his teeth into an éclair, the still-warm chocolate folding under his lips. He dabbed at them with a silk napkin. “Did the thought of killing him bother you?”

“I was *frightened*,” he drawled, “of not remembering I’d killed him.”

“You feared the lack of control, rather than the outcome.”

“Yes.”

“And if you had killed him?”

“Messy, doctor,” he scolded. “Impulsive. My DNA was everywhere, my prints would have been around his neck, and doubtless footage had captured me from his department-issued dashcam.”

“Messy,” Hannibal agreed. “And yet, I am confident of your ability to adapt to the situation.”

“That makes one of us. Besides, it’s a lot easier to adapt when one’s cognizant.”

Hannibal leaned forward into his space. His fingers came up to his mouth and gently brushed aside some pastry crumbs. “You speak as if it might happen again.”

“Mightn’t it?”

“There is always the future,” Hannibal murmured, agreeing, and finally pulled back, his breath no longer soft against his neck. “And so long as you take your course of doxycycline, odds are in favor of your cognizance.”

“Oh,” said Will, painting on a thoughtful smile. “Good.”

Truth was, he did not want to take the antibiotics until he’d googled them, away from the presence of his enterprising companion. Possibly even getting Price or Zeller to test them once he got to the BAU this afternoon. He’d mimed taking the pills earlier, the doctor seemingly fooled – at least until that subtle reminder to take his course.

“Hearing of my return, Alana has deposited herself on me for dinner this evening.” He sliced a mango and gave him half, its skin inverted and sweet flesh raised in flat spines. “Would you care to join us?”

“I…” Will fidgeted on the picnic blanket, wondering if this was how lures felt when the fish swallowed them whole. “Yes.”

Hannibal inclined his head. (And he didn't know yet, that he would wait for Will and find no Will waiting for him. That he would prowl the hallways and snatch up wispy truths from ignorant mouths, that Will had gone home with another, to another's home, smiling, willing and dreadful. That he would feel something for it, enough to slink back alone to his house in Baltimore just to prove that he really didn't.)

"Then I will pick you up from the BAU by six."

Will might not be finished by then, but he swallowed against voicing the thought.

"Six," he promised.

Botan Dōrō

Chapter by not_my_shell (Attic_Nights)

Chapter Summary

> “I can offer you some solace, if you wish to take it. Stay the night at mine.”
>
> Will tried to school his expression, to temper the confusion. “Is that a... proposition, Doctor?”
>
> “Do you hope it to be?”

Chapter Notes

> Sorry this is a little late – it’s just been one of those weeks! But, it’s somewhat fortuitous, because today (5th of October) the underworld opens! Yay! Wait, what? Well, remember my notes in chapter one, about Mundus Patet and the underworld opening three times a year? Yeah, that’s today! So go grab a ghost and kick back together over some mola salsa. And try not to get married.
>
> Even though this is the chapter that inspired the fic, it took some time to get right. We change focalization for the first time – I mean, Hannibal has such a frightening beauty in his perspective, which was so fun, but then it got to the point of *no* I can’t spend three hundred words on a tangent evaluating the loveliness of Will’s hands.
>
> Also, this is the chapter where consent takes a wee nosedive – just so you’re warned. The first scene in particular could be a little triggering, so if that’s a concern, skip to the next break (and it shouldn’t affect continuity too much).

See the end of the chapter for more notes

The black swan was restless.

Paper wings unfolded and grew before him, until he realized it wasn’t actually growing, but coming closer. Beverly held it, offered it, and withdrew it.

“Not me, doofus. *He* wants your attention,” she said, a smirk pinned to her lips, and fluttered away.

“Who?”

Hannibal's hands – whose else's could they be? – stroked his back, deeper and more ragged until he was scoring through skin to press butterfly kisses within. It did not hurt – not in a bad way, at least. Hannibal was instead the bite that told him he was alive.

Winston shuffled on the bed behind him, fuzzy and insistent. Or was that Alana? Wasn't he invited to dine with them? The questions did not matter, because Hannibal chose that moment to spread his legs, to let Will in.

"Wait," he gasped into a velvet black face, tangling his hands in the Wendigo's – no, in *Hannibal's* tines. There was something he needed to wait for. Something to do. Fish? Lure? Hannibal opened further, and Will grasped at shoulders, the flesh olive and fragile now, to stop himself from falling further in. His own legs opened, seeking to bow around slender hips.

Something panted hotly behind him, its nails that dug into his flesh at once canine and feminine. Will flinched and fell toward Hannibal, not quite diving or delving into the wide v of those offered legs, but forced inside. Disquieted, he took solace in the protective way Hannibal's jagged teeth snarled at the thing behind him.

Enchanted, he felt Hannibal's teeth one by one. The beast bared them wider and wider, mouth dark like a moonless night. Comforted, Will clambered inside that mouth, over soft lips and away from the groping hands, away from the sticky, oozing heat. But Hannibal chose to pull him back, sliding him out from under his silver tongue, unhooking him from where he clutched at his uvula. Wet, and dressed only in the air, Will felt far too vulnerable – almost to the point of making promises he should not keep.

"Rude," Hannibal chided in a voice strange and misted. "Be rude."

Will woke to groping hands and wet breathing at the back of his neck. Awareness hit him suddenly and painfully, heart leaping into his throat. Morning light sifted through a rag-shrouded window, dust motes lit and lazy in a direct counterpoint to the body behind him.

This body was not dead, he realized with a growing sense of horror.

Gasping, he tried squirming away but stiff sheets bound his legs and arms. For his trouble, his hips got shoved flat into the mattress by two wiry hands, cold air goose-pimpling his suddenly exposed back.

"Shh Bunny," said a woman, a note of wonder in her voice. "You liked it 'nuff last night."

With one hand she spread his asscheeks, a dry finger searching.

"Come on," she murmured, soothing him with nails blunt and uneven. "You said you wanted this."

He screamed into the pillow, because so many things worried him. The gap in his memory, her rough hands, the way his flesh felt bruised and sore, and still managed to spare a moment to panic at the presence of Hannibal in his sexual fantasies. *Wonderful*, he thought sarcastically, and snapped his elbow back into her solar plexus.

He flipped her, startled as she was, and straddled wide hips. She still pawed and kneaded his flesh, thinking it a game. Then she spluttered and convulsed in truncated gasps as his own hands closed about her throat. She heaved and bucked, her eyes suddenly wet with fear, eyelids purpling and lips swelling red. She tugged weakly at his fingers—

It surprised them both when he let her go.

The wind blew an awful gale outside, but he could not hear it. Framed by Hannibal's vast windows, bruised leaves twirled raggedly around a fresh cyanide sky, upwards and upwards, clawed free from their antlered branches that too seemed to stretch towards the sun. Neon debris scratched the damp earth, soda cans splicing plastic bags until they sunk like confetti into the feathers of milling ravens. It calmed him to be both an element and a spectator, sheltered as he was by glazed windows and great walls. There was his breathing, Hannibal's breathing, both soft and measured as if nothing else had a voice in the world. He reclined in Hannibal's chair, swinging idly on its castors, while its owner affected disinterest in both him and the storm, pretending to peruse his vast library.

"I'm not gay," he said suddenly, words bounding forth. He wanted them to have space, gravitas, because they felt significant – at least they had, but now they rested sour on his lips.

"It's a label some choose to avoid."

Returning a broken tome to its ledge, Hannibal moved deliberately to face him, until his hip rested on the edge of his desk. Will stared up at the doctor's tie, gold filigree set against the deepest brown.

"I'm not avoiding it – I'm addressing it."

"Like you addressed the events of this morning with me?"

Will shifted in Hannibal's chair, trying not to let guilt cross his face. Trust Hannibal to hear the omission in his tale; though he spoke freely of the sensation of the woman's life under his hands, of his in hers, he had refused to note he'd dreamt of Hannibal first.

"You slept with… Jason." Hannibal paused as if he had to try to remember his name, as if they hadn't discussed the appropriateness of desserts sweetened with blood not five minutes ago. As if the foolish cop wasn't already on something banal, like a shopping list written on the back of a gas receipt – something casual and causal. "Why does it affect you now?"

"Because I am not gay," he explained, but then his stomach spasmed. Big, hurtful bursts of laughter wheezed out, surprising him. Because he wasn't a cannibal, either, and yet he ate people.

Hannibal revealed his teeth for just a moment, which glinted in jagged amusement. “The Ancient Romans saw sexuality as not defined by one’s preference for gender, but for their preference regarding dominance. Plato, among others, spent considerable time analyzing why Patroclus was the dominant participant in his relationship with Achilles. A preference for gender was there only as an afterthought – they did not define according to it, any more than we would consider sexuality as defined by penis or clitoris size.”

“And what if someone had a really big penis?”

“Is that what you prefer, Will? A big one?”

Will barked out another laugh. “I—“

He stopped and scowled at Hannibal. Eyes blinking once, Hannibal seemed to take that as an answer, for which Will was glad, because he wasn’t even sure of the question. It was… ridiculous. “By dominance… so do you mean their sexuality was either ‘top’ or ‘bottom’?”

“If that’s the common vernacular. Yes.”

Hannibal shifted, his hand snaking toward him as if to cup the nape of his neck, or to rest steady on his shoulder. Will flinched, this morning too fresh in his mind. Hannibal withdrew with his eyes lowering.

Will coughed. “And what if someone was a switch?”

“Then they switched.”

He couldn’t stop the heat from rising to his cheeks. He scrubbed a bashful hand over his beard, grateful he hadn’t shaved.

“You enjoy this,” he said, amused. “You enjoy seeing me distressed.”

“I enjoy a carefully measured glass of wine,” Hannibal offered, and Will stumbled to realize they weren’t talking about fucking. “I enjoy facing a March sky, and feeling the first blush of spring on my cheek. Above even these I enjoy our conversations.”

“Oh,” said Will, *seeing* for a moment. “My recent dissociations – you don’t enjoy it.”

Hannibal inclined his head.

“You’d rather be in control. Of my distress,” Will finished lamely.

“Then let’s alleviate both our concerns. Your empathy is a sword, and just like any weapon it requires someone to wield it. This killer lives inside your head, and she holds your sword. You need to exorcise her phantom from your mind, Will,” Hannibal said, drawing his hands together, “I can offer you some solace, if you wish to take it. Stay the night at mine.”

Will tried to school his expression, to temper the confusion.

“Is that a... proposition, *Doctor*?”

“Do you hope it to be?” The question was asked professionally, from doctor to patient, and it took him a moment to parse its meaning.

“No,” he choked out, the word bulky and sharp. “Why would I?”

“I wouldn’t violate any of your boundaries without your permission. We are, after all, friends. I thought since you expressed dissatisfaction towards your current lack of control, I might ensure your control isn’t lost.”

“Keep me in here so I won’t be getting out to pressing any affections on any strangers?”

Hannibal didn’t nod, or smile, or say anything. His expression seemed unchanged, but Will read acquiescence there nonetheless. Obsessive, not envious, he reminded himself.

Will curled his lips into a bitter smile. “Caging me again, Hannibal?”

“Not tonight, Will.”

He nodded, eyes fixed on Hannibal’s hip. “I’ll supply the meat.”

As the first warbling notes of Handel’s *Piangero la sorte mia* trembled from his gramophone, Hannibal slowed his shading of Il Duomo, transported as he was to the last time he’d heard the piece. In his mind’s eye, he’d seen Will – then a simple curiosity in his life – rise as something triumphant and bloodied. It had been the first time he’d shed tears at music – realized music as something beyond technical beauty. It touched him, it made sense, and yet he’d still been baffled by it, something dormant inside yawning to step trembling into the light. Fingers hovering over a marble dome, he was reminded of the realization that for him, perhaps love was attainable after all. And, like Handel’s Caesar, he’d wept at his fate.

He blinked twice, and once sure the damp was not to ruin his sketch, he resumed his work, focusing this time on the clouds above the proud dome. Cirrus and cirrocumulus clouds signified a change in weather, and he wondered at their appearance, but gave them the life they deserved until they were no longer graphite but true wisps of sky.

He drew for Will, always for Will. They rose as clues, these rooms of his memory palace, and soon he would draw Will’s brain as his inner sanctum. He shouldn’t need to see it physically, touch and feel its weight, its texture and taste, to accurately depict it. But like peering over a precipice and wondering how it would be to fall, the thought did entice.

The man in question was upstairs, tucked into the guest bedroom in Hannibal’s best pajamas. Those pajamas had swum on him, his frame somehow so much smaller than his own, and Hannibal was struck by his resemblance to an ortolan – small enough to swallow whole, and fragile enough for him to enjoy it. But he slept now, and had so since barely nine, soothed under the assistance of valerian and chamomile tea, spiced with diazepam. A mild

concoction, by his standards, but sleep wouldn't take much considering the odor of exhaustion that lingered even during their session earlier that day. He could tell in the way Will wore rings under his eyes that the empath was married to his nightmares, and not to dreams, like Will was to his.

Will *should* be upstairs, which was why a soft noise prompted him to inhale sharply. Soundproofed as the house was, he picked up his scalpel and drew it deliberately over the pointed edge of his pencil, once, twice, and three times. He then allowed himself to look up at the foreign source, unsurprised but wary.

As God would, Will gazed down at him from the balustrade, hair sleep-tousled and face relaxed in a smile. He no longer wore his pajamas; Hannibal's blue silk robe clung instead to his pale body, hems of gold vortex street barely reaching mid thigh.

Beautiful, he thought, and heard the word echo in his ear. "Beautiful," said Will again, and Hannibal blinked curiously at him.

"Will?"

Bare feet padded soundlessly down the staircase, silk shifting and oscillating over pale flesh, curls bouncing with every step.

"Hannibal," the vision greeted him, and at this, at the sound of his name in that sweet mouth, the doctor found his breath stolen.

"You are unchanged," he noted, steepling his hands on his desk, mindful of his Il Duomo. The man smiled like Will and moved like Will – that is to say, rarely, tremulously, like rainfall flowing over a frozen lake. If it wasn't for the fevered sweetness that permeated the air, with such an absence of hesitance in his blue eyes, Hannibal would have spread those legs and eaten the dear boy out. Instead he sat back, enjoying the specter of Will's seduction.

"I wouldn't say that. You changed me. This is your design."

Hannibal allowed a small smile to twist his lips. "Is this an attempt to appeal to my ego?"

Will played with the robe's tie, careless fingers running along its seams.

"If I wanted to appeal to your ego, I would appear before you more malleable. Clay. Marble. Something you can cleave away at. Make into you instead of for you. You do so enjoy an art project."

In concurrence, Hannibal waved a falsely careless hand over his sketching, and painted a smile at the solid apparition in front of him. "And yet you believe that's not what I want?"

"Not anymore. Dr Lecter, you like me just the way I am. Always have."

Fascinating.

Something warm awoke from the pit of his gut, dark, sharp and enticing. Blossoming like blood into water, or like a bruise blooming into soft tissue.

“You used before the word *cleave.* An interesting choice, meaning either to separate from, or to cling to. Which would you prefer I did?”

“You and I? There is no such distinction between the two. Break. Clutch. Fall.” Will affected a sigh; the only sign that he was baiting the hook was a slight curve to his lips. “If we allow the cards to fall as they have been dealt, we would be apart again. Swapping Christmas cards. I might even get married.”

Hannibal tensed, and in order for it to be imperceptible, he relegated the tenseness into straightening his spine. “You would wish us together.”

“Empathy mode, Hannibal,” he chided. “I’m mirroring you.”

“Mirroring me is not exclusive of your own desires. One sees a mirror through one’s own eyes, after all.”

Thoughtful, Will tapped his oft-bitten bottom lip with his index finger. “Only one way to find out. Or are you scared?”

“Of you?”

“Of desire.”

Hannibal felt eviscerated, gutted by these strange eyes that did not avoid and only *saw*. “Why do you believe that, Mirror?”

“I don’t want to be lonely. But I’ll find a substitution. You will too, no doubt. Someone else to tinker with. I think she’ll have soft brown hair and bright blue eyes. An air of innocence, and a waft of danger.”

“Careful, Will. You’re betraying your intention to manipulate me.”

“And I’m aware that you’re aware that I’m trying to manipulate you. And it’s working.” Will stepped backwards, never taking his eyes from him. “A wife to give me a child. Someone like the first one, the mathematician who lived on Pemrose Lane. She offered me pancakes and let me go. She was *nice*.”

Will dropped his robe. It fell shimmering down his back, blue silk cascading to pool on the timber floors, leaving a naked form in its wake. Orange and red struck and caressed his alabaster skin, burning with it the scorching scent of Will’s growing arousal. Under the smoky firelight, Will stood as a paragon of humanity, and as a triumph over it, too. Hannibal wondered, not for the first time, what it might be like to join the defeated ranks of humanity, if it could mean losing to one such as him.

Blinking, Hannibal worked back the silken conversational thread so flung asunder. “For whom is this working?”

“For both of us,” answered Will, moving to his usual seat without shame or even cognizance of his nakedness. He sat upon the plush cushion, with his knees together and his hands relaxed, just as he had done in session. He affected a nervous smile, but not at his nakedness.

Hannibal grew impatient, but composed himself. His Will deserved patience. “Manipulation suggests a power imbalance. Its very nature is suggestive of a single conqueror.”

Will seemed to come to a similar conclusion. He yawned when Hannibal would not, pink mouth open wide, teeth sharp. He stretched languidly across the chair into a pose that had his trapezius shift in a manner unimagined. The sight had him eager to pick up his pencil, but he settled for mentally cataloguing the details of Will’s frame, for future reference. The teacher would make a lovely Patroclus.

“We’ve been doing this dance for so long, Dr Lecter,” Will drawled, Louisianan straddling his vowels, and Hannibal did not have to wonder how the other marks had been so readily seduced. “It’s no wonder we can’t do much else but waltz.”

“A waltz requires only one leader. Do you desire to learn a new dance?”

“Interesting choice of words. *Desire*.” Will smiled, and it was incongruously innocent. “Don’t you?”

“No one is truly equal,” he replied, both an answer and a non-answer.

“Some animals are more equal than others?” The other man scoffed, his blue eyes wry. He was always so unconsciously animated, but now his expressions seemed forced. “You’re distracted, Dr. Lecter. So you think us equals?”

“Friendship has as equal a dance as any. Are you not satisfied with that?”

He stilled every movement in the hope to shut the empath out. Truthfully, he wanted everything and nothing, and with that always bred a sense of dissatisfaction. He had moved beyond a clinically curious examination Will Graham’s mind, into a carnal longing to explore, worship, and above all, to taste. Since he had met Will Graham, since the moment he found the world empty and whole, and realized love attainable after all.

Will was an empty teacup and Hannibal wanted nothing more than to fill him.

The specter laughed suddenly, the sword of empathy still in hand.

“Buster and Winston uncovered a rabbit warren this morning. The rabbits scattered out in different directions, distracting the dogs. They split off.” Will shuffled his hands to demonstrate. “To better the survival of not only themselves but of their friends. Except for two – a mating pair. They ran... together. Their life was, for them, equal as a combined whole.”

“Were these the two rabbits you gifted me for our dinner?”

“Yes.”

“We are not rabbits, Will.”

Will smiled – a wicked thing. “No, we are not.”

“So are you one of the dogs that hunts the rabbit?”

“I am your friend, Hannibal. We are not part of the pack. But should you choose to run, a friend offers support but no guide. They don’t follow the condemned into the Valley of Death like a lover would.”

Will’s words reminded him of a familiar dream, and glazed it in doubt.

Somewhere in Italy, a family could be drinking freshly brewed coffee. The old Tuscan sun would catch Will’s cheek, and the coarse oil of sage from their tilled garden would linger under his fingernails. A cool salt breeze would toss his empath’s curling locks, and Abigail’s laughter would bubble from the doorway, her cool blue eyes entwined with the warm, yeasty scent of homecoming. Would he be satisfied?

Hannibal stayed silent, keeping what he could shrouded. What he sought to do required subterfuge, after all.

Still reclined on his chair, Will stroked idle hands down a bare chest. “If the dogs come barking, don’t leave without me. Promise me, Hannibal.”

“What would you do if I did?" wondered Hannibal.

A strange light flashed in Will’s eyes, and they became hazy, misted. “Wade into the quiet of the stream.” He turned. “I wonder, would that gut you?”

You are mine, dear Will, he thought. Then he repeated those words aloud, because if he closed his eyes and breathed through his mouth he could pretend this mirror was Will, and pretty words always bloomed like bloodied roses on Will’s cheeks.

“I promise, Will.”

Will rose, and he was aware that Will was not going to stop. Rising with him, he let Will’s jaw cut into his hands; he did not flinch this time, and Hannibal was enchanted.

He touched his ears. Will was strangely self conscious about them, which only made him love them more. He would savor them, perhaps candied whole with cherry glaze, and nibbled delicately until Will was as red as his ears.

He felt sweet, fevered breath flutter against his lips, which he parted in consideration. Will was still, patient, and he kissed him. Ideally, this would be something Will was cognizant of – had counted on it, but no one could say he wasn’t an adaptable animal. Pulling back, he wove Will’s hand with his own.

“Come,” he urged, bending to kiss his wrist. “Please?”

Will smiled. He stared at him, into him, and Hannibal did not have to let some of his want bleed through, because Will saw it there anyway.

He guided Will upstairs, leading him gently into the master bedroom. At the threshold he hesitated for a moment, not wanting to hurt Will – *his* Will.

The specter tugged him forward with a wry smile, legs bouncing and easy as they toppled onto the bedspread. Will's lips parted below his own, sweet and naïve. They fit like this on the bed, no awkward elbows or jerky movements. Will could see him, know when he was moving, what he was feeling, and he adjusted his smaller frame accordingly. Covering him, he nuzzled at Will's neck, careful not to do so much as to burn with his stubble.

Will gasped, a ragged sound. Like a first breath.

Like a last.

Hannibal grasped Will's other hand, to hold it pinned with one hand with its twin above their heads. With a desperate roll of his hips, his left hand searched for the hidden latch in the bedhead, feeling for the handcuffs secreted there. They snapped around his wrists, one, two, in quick succession.

Hannibal frowned, resisting the reflexive urge to tug against his sudden bindings. Instead, he pulled them together so the metal would not chafe, the long chain secured in the heart of the ornate mahogany bedhead, locking him in their location. Below him, Will wriggled ingenuously.

"I was a cop, you know."

In response to the ire sparking in his eyes, Will shimmied out from beneath him. Hannibal turned to face him, and Will took the opportunity to straddle his hips.

"Luring me into your room with the intention of chaining me to the bed? Counterintuitive," Will chided, licking his lips. "Kinky, but limiting, Hannibal."

"I'm sorry Will. You were clear in your position this afternoon regarding our relationship."

"My position is currently my ass on your dick. Feels…" Will rocked back and forth twice, bare skin against wool trousers. "Like home," the Mirror finished.

"You are not yourself, Will. If this plays out like your previous romances, you would awaken with no knowledge. I refuse to violate your trust like that."

"He doesn't have to know."

He smiled at Will's acquiesce of him being other. Will smiled back, and if he could not capture that smile on paper, perhaps he could put those lips in his mouth and taste the way they smiled.

"Do you plan to be civil and retire to your bedroom?" At Will's wicked, bashful grin, Hannibal tugged his hands, keeping his face suitably blank as he felt for the key. "Since you've decided to lock me here with you then, I anticipate an awkward morning after. I merely ask you not to exacerbate that."

Will sighed and removed from his mouth the key. Hannibal had never enjoyed magic tricks; angered, he felt his top lip twitch. Will tossed the key over his shoulder, and it landed beyond the threshold. Out of reach. *Caged.*

He snarled.

Will caught his snarl in a sharp kiss, and chewed it away. He tore the buttons to his shirt and spread it wide. Perfunctory hands unbuckled his belt and bared his lower half, taking even his socks to toss crumpled on the floor. The mirror pulled back to hover over him, not an inch touching.

“They say you are what you eat,” Will drawled, “and tomorrow, Doctor Lecter? Tomorrow I wanna wake up as you.”

He just hovered there, twenty-two feet of skin and eleven-point-two pounds of blood. His lids dropped and slight moans hitched the ends of his breath, caught in an imagining Hannibal was not part of. The sharp scent of preseminal fluid grew prominent, more desperate, and Hannibal halted this false Will.

“Enough.”

Will raised his eyebrows at him, gave a full body moan. Both bared and raw, Will lowered so that his body finally branded him. So that his pelvis cupped the swell of his ass. “Want me to stop? I can.”

Hannibal swallowed and said nothing. He wanted nothing more than to tear the man’s throat out. His blood, hot and pure, rushing down his pale neck to paint the skin there red. Sink his teeth into the salt of his neck, the flesh of his shoulder and the swell of his cock. Tear and suck and kiss until all he was left with, cupped in his hands, was a beautiful mess of Will Graham. He wanted to lock him in his basement, cut him open, consume his clever heart raw. Hunt him, hunt with him, and feel his body warm and alive as their pig fell cold between them. Lick the grit from his wounds, stitch him up, rip him apart, and piece him together again. Gentle him, protect him, fill him, consume him, until Will was all that there was. Bloodied, rude and fragile.

Always would Will be the most beautiful part of him.

Hands wrapped around his neck, squeezing, pleased. “So intimate,” Will murmured, breathing hot and sweet against his cheek.

Hannibal’s cock swelled. He bucked his hips, but not to escape. Will let go of his neck only to sink blunt teeth into the juncture of his shoulder. Hannibal gasped, feeling his flesh purple and swell, his blood vessels burst and spill. He would bruise ugly, be marked, and in the morning he might forgo a scarf, his tie, so the only thing possessing him was the ghost of Will’s teeth.

He bucked again, his cock aching, a pain sweeter than the curve of Will’s ribs, than the bouquet of his blood. The mirror chuckled, and slunk down his body, teeth dragging along his chest, his stomach, and finally his thighs. Hannibal looked fondly at the head mouthing the hard tendons of his thighs. Dark locks curled around his groin, occasionally sticking to and wetted by his dripping erection. When Hannibal flexed in wait, Will inched further south, playfully ignoring his twitching member. Dragging rough stubble over tender skin. He moved that critical inch to hold him close, at once ravenous and tender.

Hannibal snapped his thighs around Will's neck, pressure informed through a weakening pulse and a convulsing windpipe. A swift stutter and a tender sigh, and Hannibal released him.

Will fell face first into his groin. With his hands bound it took some maneuvering, but he was used to handling uncooperative bodies. He coaxed Will to his side, until the dark head was pillowed on his chest. His breathing fluttered raw until it fell into the cadence of sleep, like a string had been plucked and the puppet was sunk into slumber.

Hannibal watched him for the longest while, because he could, because Will could not yet disallow it. He breathed in those soft curls and nuzzled a hot forehead. He licked at a bead of sweat and thought of teacups, and how beautiful Will looked when he came together.

Will was so warm. The air's fevered sweetness softened, his roiling breaths causing Hannibal to erode in his arms. Falling, falling to sleep. Hannibal fell like this, his arms opened for the impossible man, the only man who so heard the beating ache of his heart.

Chapter End Notes

Do Hannibal and Will Graham ever do the dipsy doodle? Find out next week!

*Handel's *Piangero la sorte mia* was that song we saw performed at the opera in Sorbet (1x07). It's a very telling piece, subtext/allusions ahoy! It's part of an opera about Julius Caesar in Egypt; Cleopatra uses at first her womanly wiles to seduce Cesare and gain the throne of Egypt, and then becomes totally engaged in the love affair with him. She is both sensual and magnificent. Truly, Hannibal is the show that keeps on giving.

Kappa

Chapter by not_my_shell (Attic_Nights)

Chapter Summary

> “Forgiveness is such a profound, conscious and unconscious state of affairs. You can’t actually choose to do it. It simply happens to you.” – Bella Crawford, in *Mizumono*.

Chapter Notes

> *saunters in a week late with Starbucks* Oops! Sorry!
>
> There are a few things in here I've provided notes for - plant meanings, a line of french. I've marked them with an asterisk* Hover over them with your mouse (doesn't work on mobile, unfortunately) and it should pop up.
>
> I think you’ve all guessed by now I’m a huge geek. I love knowledge and ideas, but above all I love the reader/author dynamic. And I have to gush over how good and surprising it is to see so many people reading, commenting, kudos’ing and enjoying this story. Because somehow, in this small, profound way, you’ve managed to step inside the philosophical and historical depths of my mind and not minded the heft that presses so from these words. For those who just came for the zany gay plot, I’m sorry if I misled or disappointed you. I know this is a heavy story. I know it’s full of stuff that people wouldn’t necessarily get, or want to get – but thank Fuller for making Hannibal a perfect vehicle for that. So thank you for staying with me, for dealing with my syntax, metaphors, allegories, and criticisms of narrative and imagination. It’s catharsis, something I needed to get out, have been getting out since I first started working on the bones of this story over a year ago. And now it’s over. Thank you, to all of you.
>
> Now for something you’ve all been waiting for – here’s the porn.

Alert but not alarmed, Will cast his hook downstream, the lure spinning blue and gold through the air. It splashed below the surface unseen, silent except for the soft rushing of water which hugged his rubber boots and melted around his hips. As the stream pulled him closer, safer, his guide the Ravenstag advanced around a marble colonnade, hooves rattling against mosaic grass. He wondered where his dogs had gone, and looked down to see that though he had cast the hook, he held no fishing rod in his hands. He must have left it on his windowsill back in Wolf Trap, but its loss didn’t bother him, not when he was already feeling so at home.

Bleached bones started to drift past, beautiful against the dark stream, and he cocked his head at them as they eddied over submerged rocks and reeds. A jawbone caught on him, nuzzling into the back of his knee. Like it was part of him, and Will woke believing that was so. He clawed out from the stream and sunk his fingers around a sharp hip, surprised to feel it so warm.

“Hannibal?”

A bony knee brushed his thigh, which, like the rest of his body, was toasty-warm under heavy silks and linens. A rough cheek fondly nuzzled his crown, so gentle in its regard that Will gasped. He flew back in shock, placing distance between him and the man. The reality of the situation set him afire, kindled by the heat of embarrassment, shame and betrayal. Hannibal had betrayed him. But Hannibal simply smiled, something more than the simple twitching of the corners of his mouth, and in his minimalist way, shook his head.

Will had often seen Hannibal look pleased, but this was the first time he’d seen him look with absolute pleasure upon something. *Him.* A certain fondness in his eyes, and for those first, gasping moments, Will found himself unable to look away. The fondness receded slowly, like an ocean dragging sand from a beach, as if Hannibal did not want to make obvious to Will his pleasure – or at least, the depths of it. Will saw anyway and frowned. Shifting slightly, he was warm but he wasn’t safe; Hannibal’s hands twitched against steel handcuffs, slender wrists reddened and chafed. Will’s hands trickled around the bedhead, curious as to its seams and mechanism.

With a voice sleep roughened and soothing as a cat’s tongue, the doctor spoke.

“Good morning, Will.”

Will swallowed, throat sore and dry.

“You were supposed to not let me lose control.”

Hannibal’s expression withdrew further and Will floundered at the loss. The doctor’s hands flexed, jingling the handcuffs slightly. Will shook his head. Strangely, his bindings were more frightening than if he were free.

“I’ll admit there were… unforeseen circumstances. Why don’t you use your empathy to find out?”

Will stared at Hannibal’s chest. “I’d really rather not.” He had really flushed nipples – the same color as his lips. He halted his hand inches from the left one, nearly touching the blanket of chest hair; as much as it surprised him to see the immaculate doctor looking so wild and untamed when bared, it meant to him that Hannibal was never truly bare.

“As you wish.”

Will cast about for his clothes helplessly. He remembered donning Hannibal’s too-big pajamas, but they were suspiciously absent. Scowling, he cupped his genitals and slithered

out from under the covers. Exposed, he shivered and grabbed what he supposed were Hannnibal's briefs. They fit snugly and he stalled at the intimacy of it.

Hannibal's voice washed over his back. "He was a talented and enterprising mirror; he saw elements of what I wanted and would have given them to me. If I had let him."

Will swallowed, stuck, and sunk to the bed. "He didn't. We didn't?"

"No."

It was on the tip of his tongue to ask what exactly he might have given to Hannibal to fulfill his wants. But the chance was that the mirror, as Hannibal called him, was split between the role it was given by the Killer, and the script it saw in Hannibal's eyes. The sexual element, he rationalized, was there as a reflection of the original crime. That Hannibal did not seem fussed, or disgusted by it, told Will he was amused by the proceedings, as a falling brick is amused by the crown of a person's head.

"Handcuffs?" he wondered instead.

"Does it seem so farfetched that I sometimes like to give up control?"

"Yes," he scoffed. "If we didn't… how…"

Hannibal smiled benignly. "I wrung your neck with my thighs when you bent to suck my cock."

"Shit, Hannibal."

"I'd have preferred you cognizant," he added helpfully.

Will swallowed. Words, words were hard. "Why…" why am I here, why is it so warm, why are you handcuffed to the bed, why do you have a hickey, why "are you looking at me like that?"

Hannibal quirked a barely-there eyebrow and swallowed.

"I appreciate beauty. You are beautiful, Will."

The thought crossed him. That if he stayed in bed, if he killed Hannibal, maybe that would be all right.

"I don't want... to talk about it."

The philipshead slipped and the screw went flying. His dogs leapt forth to snuffle after it somewhere behind him, their claws clicking on the floorboards. Will clenched his jaw and

didn't turn around.

Beverly prodded him. "Did he? Tell you about it, I mean. What happened, or… didn't?"

"Told me enough – half of it with spoken words, even."

He heard a sigh and wondered why she couldn't be a normal dead person and not need to breathe, let alone sigh. She sat cross-legged next to him. The Ravenstag clip-clopped across the room, black feathers shimmering orange in the dying sunlight. Will swiveled on his butt until he faced them both, wary. With careful movements the great beast knelt, lowering silently down alongside them. One human, one ghost, and one guide sat in a circle. The ghost laughed, and petted the stag on the nose, who snorted. The human wondered for his sanity.

"How about the case then?"

"Not really on my mind."

She scoffed. "Isn't it? It's inside you. Who is she, Will?"

"I don't know."

"Maybe she doesn't know either."

Will frowned, slipping the motor's crankshaft into place. "Dissociative identity disorder?"

"Could fit." She grinned. "Being in control must be tough when half your life isn't yours."

He rubbed his forehead with the cleanest part of his arm. "Are we still talking about her?"

"That was your doing, that time. Although, it could be why you find it so easy to relate."

"Go on then. Profile her," he challenged the ghost.

The ghost puffed up, and except for her rapier smile she reminded him of an eager student. "A woman has two selves, opposite in many ways. Both fond of control. One self seduces, then the other self wakes up. Loss of control. Drives her to think the only way to bring that control back is—"

Beverly made a dead noise and drew her finger across her neck.

He nodded, oil-black hands itching for a pen. "Take away the inconsistencies the other self bring." Four days to profile – not his worst, but not his best, either. "Who's my other half then? Some crazed Don Juan?"

Beverley flicked her eyes between him and the Ravenstag. She raised her eyebrows. He raised his in return.

"I thought you said it was my guide."

“No, that’s what you concluded from too much popcorn and late night quasi-homoerotic TV. I’m a figment of your imagination, remember? Dream manic pixie girl, or whatever.” She tapped his head. He moved backwards under the pressure. “Boop. Boop. Booooooop.”

“Stop that. And Garrett Jacob Hobbs was– *is* dead. I started seeing the Ravenstag during his case.” He’d crawled so far inside his head but he was dead even there. No more room for him, now. Beverly was a preferable ghost. He gave her a crooked smile to show her his appreciation, a smile which she did not return.

“He wasn’t the one to kill the girl dressed in ravens, mounted aloft by antlers.”

“You mean Cassie Boyle.”

“You’ve already got two parts. Angler and victim. Overlapping, but separate. Which one’s you, Champ?”

Will emailed Jack his unofficial report later that evening, thinking he didn’t have to show up at the BAU for, as Jack had put it, a ‘nice’ murder. He signed off with the expected promises to be there in the morning, to draw the official profile so it could be stamped and signed. He shut down the laptop and sighed when his phone rang, Jack Crawford blinking up from the caller ID.

“Dissasociative Identity disorder?” Jack said by way of greeting, his thunder losing some of its emphasis through the small speaker.

Will chewed the inside of his cheek. “It’s why the other profiles varied – hard to pin down when there’s more than one personality in place.”

“Took you a while.”

“You’re scolding me. Four days is hardly a while.” He poured himself a contemplative drink of his preferred jack, the amber liquid sloshing around cut crystal. “And I had a fever.”

“You need time off?”

“On the mend.” He eyed Hannibal’s antibiotics perched on his kitchen table. Out of impulse he took one, wincing as they went down with the whiskey. On his way out of the kitchen he grabbed a banana to line his stomach.

“Good,” said Jack, not sounding worried at all. “How’s the Hannibal situation?”

“There’s…” he hesitated. Hannibal craved complete control over him. Telling Jack would be an act of rebellion. “A slight intimacy thing.”

“I don’t care how intimate you two get so long as it’s within the reasonable confines of the law.”

“Hilarious, Jack.” *We only slept together* was on the tip of his tongue – thankfully, he managed to swallow it down.

“You’re not getting ‘lost’?”

Will scoffed. “Traversing a maze like Hannibal is easy enough when I can see it from above.”

“Mmhmm. You keep that high ground then. Well, I’ll have psychiatric records matched to your profile. I'll see you in my office at…” Papers rustled on the other end. “9:15.”

“Nine fifteen,” he repeated.

“And Will. Thanks.”

Will stared at his phone, line dead, and noticed a missed call from Hannibal. He winced and let the battery run flat.

He fell asleep that night in his bed and woke the next morning in the same place, cold, the blankets slightly mussed, with the only stranger being himself.

Will kept his phone on silent, so when it rang he had an excuse as to why he did not answer it. He slept alone and dined alone, ignoring Beverly as much as he could. He fed himself well and his dogs even better.

Until nearly a week went by, and he realized the missed phone calls from Hannibal tallied to just two.

In his dreams he hoisted himself higher, forging the moral high ground as his mountain. He looked over the precipice, always expecting to see Hannibal below him. Perhaps his hair would be buffeted by the wind, and his hands would claw up the granite slopes. He waited until the sun died in a purple gasp. Until the sun rose again to yawn yellow into the sky. It was only when he sunk his feet into the earth like roots and cast his crown towards the forest that he realized Hannibal had been beside him all along.

Hannibal was waiting for him to call. It was classic technique, but Will wasn’t going to let Hannibal emerge triumphant from this.

The next day he woke to a care basket on his threshold. The pack nearly tore into it, and Will received bruises from the eager dogs when he tried salvaging it. The Ravenstag snuffled at it as he lugged it onto the railings, scowling at the implication that he needed to be taken care of.

He peeled back a red ribbon to leave it pooling on the ground. Splitting open the package revealed blood red apples and plush pomegranates, a pound of sweet potatoes and a few unidentifiable root veggies. Under these laid a CD of some classical music, and in the center was curled a pair of skinned rabbits festooned with two lemons and ziplock bags of sage, rosemary and thyme*. He spent an absurd amount of time rifling around to find the parsley, before realizing Hannibal was not intentionally referencing the song *Scarborough Fair*.

He rocked back on his heels, feeling antlers blossom painlessly from his shoulder blades. Something about it struck him as odd.

“Just whose design is this even?”

Winston whined and Will scratched his downy ears, amused.

A small card expressed a single word –

Will.

He winced and lowered it back to the threshold. He left it all outside, let his dogs tear through it, until cardboard and guts littered the surrounding fields.

On a whim – well, not so much as a whim but a reluctance to deal with the beast that so clawed at his gut – Will left a voicemail on Hannibal’s mobile when he knew the man was in session, cancelling tomorrow’s evening session. He cited the Olvick Case, as it was now known, and wondered at the way his voice never trembled. When he returned to his paperwork, Price complimented his appearance.

“You look rested,” the man said, fiddling with several scalpels. He catalogued them, setting each one aside with a flourish.

Zeller clicked a ballpoint and scoffed. “Heard you got some nookie.”

“Oh, so that’s what it is!” Price beamed and tried looking him in the eye. Genuine, caring. If he were a dog, Will might’ve taken him home.

Will avoided eye contact and stared at the laptop screen. The morgue had been so empty just half an hour ago. Just him and the dead, and the dead only talked half as much. Sighing, he went back to her file, mentally checking what he’d guessed right, and what he’d remained blind to. Caroline Olvick stared back blankly from her driver’s license, her short ginger hair

slicked down. Her starched shirt was neatly buttoned, her lipstick carefully lined, and nothing external existed to reveal the aphasia of her inner self.

Zeller slapped his paperwork on the autopsy table. “I still think she should’ve been called the Preying Mantis. And like preying with an “e” because—”

“Tacky,” said Will, looking up to notice Price and Zeller standing close to each other. Their proximity, the intimacy of their friendship made him blush.

“You see?” Price crowed. “I told you. Tacky.”

Zeller rolled his eyes.

“Uh, Jimmy? Can I speak to you?” Will asked, and when Zeller moved too he realized he should’ve clarified. “Alone.”

“Sure,” said Price, snapping a pair of latex gloves. He eyed Zeller, who grunted and left the room. Alone, he asked, “What’s this about?”

“What’s it like to sleep with a man?”

Jimmy rocked back on his heels, surprised. “You shedding loose your heterosexuality?

“What’s left of it, probably.”

“Is this about someone about yea big?” He gestured high above Will’s head and Will rolled his eyes. “Eccentric, possible cannibal with cheekbones so sharp you could use them to grate parmesan? I understand your angle, but is this even ethical?”

Will wanted to remain silent but Jimmy simply quirked his eyebrows in wait. “I’m appealing to his better nature,” he explained, and Jimmy nodded. “He craves complete control over me, to see him, to realize my potential.”

“So, BDSM?” Jimmy deadpanned, then pursed his lips. “Will, are you sure about this?”

Will itched out an amused smile. “Is it… terribly different to a woman?”

Jimmy shrugged and air exploded from his cheeks. “I wouldn’t know.”

“You never experimented?”

“Have you?”

Will shook his head. “Once. Don’t remember it.”

“Y’know, I wasn’t exactly what you’d call a cool kid. By the time anyone showed any interest in me…”

“You were already comfortable in your sexuality,” Will finished.

He smiled, but it didn’t reach his cheeks. “I kissed a girl *once*.”

Will startled. “You kissed Beverly?”

“How— Only because Zee— you know what?” Jimmy put his hands up in surrender. “Never mind. Anyway, it was softer? No stubble – *that* was strange. She had the most mobile tongue. I suppose in the end we’re all sacks of meat trying to either procreate or fit in with the tribe. I mean, I’d definitely have preferred kissing someone with a little more jawbone, but aside from a few quirks of anatomy we’re all pretty much the same.”

“Will I get stubble burn*?”* He squinted, somewhat horrified at the prospect.

Jimmy howled. “That’d mark you up. But I got the feeling he’d be gentle with you. A bit rough, but not too much. After all, he does worship you. Makes a priest look like a demon in comparison. Aside from the whole, y’know, serial killer thing, you’d make a pretty good couple.”

“If Hannibal and I become intimate,” emphasized Will.

“If,” Jimmy repeated, and looked at him curiously. “You know, mallard drakes*–”

“Thanks, Jimmy.”

Ready to leave for the day, Will rounded a corner full of shadows into a shattered body.

He swore, then lowered his voice. “What’re you doing here?”

The ghost sighed and peered at Price and Zeller through one of the round windows of the morgue door. “I miss them.”

Something pulled at his heart. “You meant a lot to them.”

“They moved on. Losers.”

“They’re still processing their grief,” he corrected, though it was only the truth by a small margin. Soon Beverly would ache to them only in the smallest details, in forgotten moments and beautiful days.

“Come on.”

She was smiling far too brightly, her edges strained. It looked fake.

“What?”

“Me. It’s me. Time to let me go, Will Graham.”

“You’re in my head. Shouldn’t you be fighting for your continued existence?”

As if at his reminder, Beverly craned about to make sure no one was there to notice the BAU's resident kook talking to himself. Coast clear, she let a smile slice her cheeks.

"Can't exist in a broken mind."

"Yes you can." You *do*, already.

Beverly raised an eyebrow, then sighed. "Okay, yeah. I can. But it won't be interesting. And I fought before my death last time, which majorly sucked."

"You think it's inevitable."

"You're not immortal."

"I wanted to avenge you," he stated, his upset making him slow and deliberate.

She blinked at him slowly. Her body split fractionally as she flowed across the hallway to her origami swan, which perched atop a box of files. She threw it at him; in a ghostly arc the black body fluttered into his hands. He wondered if it had always been there, resting in his rough palms. If he'd taken it with him here. He liked to think he caught it.

"*Wanted*," she parroted. "Past tense. Look after the living first, kiddo."

He looked at the black swan in his hands, so, so small, and swallowed.

The next day flowers bloomed on his doorstep. Pink peonies, purple hyacinth, white camellia and yellow tulips* sprouted from a cherry wood box with mother of pearl inlays. Once again his dogs circled, but they moved slower, less riveted, and soon Buster and Ginger were gallivanting through the yard's fresh growth.

He parted the flowers and saw at the center a rose whose petals were stained a vivid red. A snort behind him caused him to jump, and he nearly tore the blossoms out with flustered fingers.

"Orange blossom," drawled Beverly, rippling forth from a shadow. Her edges hung bloodied as she skipped to his side. "Don't they use that in weddings?"

Will gentled the mentioned blossoms that wreathed the bouquet in cloud. "Fertility."

She barked out a genuine laugh, the edges of her smile bright and stitched with sunlight. "Is he saying you're fertile, or him?

"We had a child," he snapped, and scratched under his collar.

Soothing his hands down the stems he noticed the soil shallow. Curious, he bunched the flowers and moved them inside for water. The box perched on his table, and with shaking fingers he removed the shallow tray of soil. Peering inside at its contents, he wondered if it was Jason's, then considered it too big. He thought about ringing Jack before dismissing that too. Hannibal wouldn't leave evidence, not for something like this.

Beverly pushed through Marlon and Winston to peer over his shoulder. "Wow. That's seriously screwed up."

"It's romantic," he said of Hannibal intentions, stepping inside his skin for the first time since…

He frowned.

"Don't you think that's whacked? Seriously though. And I worked in a morgue – a real fucking *heart."*

"Hannibal doesn't think it's screwed up."

"What do you think? That Hannibal's one of your dogs leaving you some fresh kill?"

"I think it's rude to ignore intentions."

"I think he wants to put his bam-bam in your ham."

He spun to confront the shattered thing. "Won't you leave?"

She shrugged, dark eyes blinking slowly, eyelids dragging shadows across the sky. "Like I said before. I'm waiting for you, Will."

Lost, Will caressed the two words carved into the bloodied heart -

See me.

"You've been taking your antibiotics," Hannibal noted, pleased, not a hint of apology in his voice.

Hannibal and Will stared out over the Chesapeake Bay, Beverly's black swan in his pocket. Standing on neutral ground, it was the first real words either of them had voiced since the morning after.

Will drew in a shaky breath and pretended it was the weekend's howling wind that had clawed him so close to Hannibal's plaid charcoal hip. The man emanated warmth through his clothes, hot compared to the gale. Will couldn't imagine moving away, not when he was the one to stand so close to begin with. Instead he withdrew the swan, his sleeve dragging against

Hannibal's waist, and pinched its head soundly between his thumb and forefinger. Hannibal watched him with a curious edge to his eyes, pretending to look at it with knowledge of its significance.

"Folding a thousand paper cranes is said to bring good fortune," said Hannibal. "You have a desire for luck because you feel you otherwise lack autonomy over your fortune."

Will scoffed. "It's a black swan."

"A black swan," Hannibal mused, unaffected. "As a theory, it identifies as the unpredictable events that shake the very foundations of the world. The internet, the 9/11 attacks – shaped the world in an unimaginably profound way. They are easy to rationalize post-event, but their effect can never be predicted without hindsight."

"Everything can be imagined; foresight is as simple as acknowledging chaos," he argued, eyes fixed on a red and yellow tie that seemed to burst from the coals of Hannibal's suit.

"I lack foresight with you, Will."

At this Will tried to restrain his smile, and it ended up twisted and bare on his face. "I'm not a black swan. My presence in your life could hardly change the world."

"You see yourself as unimportant, and yet every day we change countless possibilities in every moment, our breath becoming hurricanes and our footsteps earthquakes."

"A nice sentiment. I like the idea of changing everything. But I don't desire that."

Hannibal nodded at the expanse of the bay, features softened by the sinking sun. "We often desire the things that will destroy us in the end."

"Destruction requires a degree of intimacy," he agreed.

"You said killing me would be intimate. You desire that, too."

"Killing you or being intimate?"

"Do you believe there to be a difference?"

"Yes. But you don't." Will sighed, taking Hannibal's words as an apology. It was all he was to get. "It's like I said before. I'm not going to kill you when I finally find you interesting."

With a tilt of his chin and a measured exhale, Hannibal shifted closer, his silvering sun-wreathed hair casting cool protective shadows over Will's eyes. "You like being interested?"

"Yeah well," Will scoffed. "I like people too much or not at all. I've got to go down deep, to fall into people, to really know them."

"Will you fall into me, Will?"

The Chesapeake Bay used to freeze over. People could walk from one side to another. In the seventeenth century thousands of soldiers from Sweden marched miles to Denmark across such frozen waters. The ice buckled but held strong, and the Swedes won. Will imagined an army marching across Beverly's frozen body. She wouldn't so much as buckle as snap, the soldiers falling between her cracks, and perhaps the same would happen to him. Afloat until fallen. Alive until the very moment he wasn't. He considered letting her go along the wind-whipped water until she was just a black swan bobbing along. The water lapping thick and wasted like Abigail's blood. The night sky sleek and dark as Alana's hair.

Perhaps the swan would swim to Australia, riding the currents and jet streams to be coughed up along a sandy shore. Beverly's course was always straight and true, her morality as sharp as her marksmanship. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Hannibal place a hand on the railing, not far from his own, and thought about how she'd failed in that regard. She'd wandered into the lion's lair and came from it forever shattered, to be fixed no more. The lion prowled still despite her, despite him, and Will shuddered to realize the simple fact of her death was that it held no more profound meaning than if she'd lived.

Will tore the black swan from his side, the tiny folds of paper threatening to flap free in the bay's howling wind. She was smooth, delicate, and he roughly pitched his arm backward to hurl it into the deep. It flew in a graceful arc, tumbling into the waters like a stone.

For a minute Will saw it as so. It sunk and bobbed up again, and he saw it gasp once and fall. Then Will looked at the paper swan perched still in his hand. He thought of unpredictability, and decided he wished the zebra to live.

"I'd have greater luck falling into a city wall. You're impenetrable to siege."

Hannibal turned to regard him, antlered and terrible and graceful, and Will returned the black swan to his hungry pockets. "You are not a siege," Hannibal agreed. "Nonetheless I find myself in your presence. You wade through my walls as one might wade through a stream."

Will closed his eyes and smiled at his stream. It was all he needed, really. "You seek something primal and quiet – impenetrable and fluid? Quite a leap from a city, or even a stream, come to think of it."

There was a touch at his cheek, smooth claws tilting him away from the horizon. Blinking, Will stared into Hannibal's fathomless eyes and Hannibal returned the favor. Will ducked when he had seen enough, Hannibal's fingers falling as he did so, and turned back to the bay.

"You must think me blind."

"I think you a vision, Will."

Will laughed, shocked into an embarrassed smile. "Jesus. I realize that *now*. Although, you've wanted me for a while. Not always like this, but you've always craved me, craved control, ownership of me. That's what I can't fathom. You're mad to think so. I'm not sure I want to realize *why.*"

Hannibal took his hand from the railing and held it as if he had always held it, with fingers entwining and palms soft.

“We should jump together, then,” Hannibal murmured, “you and me, and find our solace within the other’s depths.”

“Is this even ethical?” Will wondered as he stood in Hannibal’s kitchen, eyeing a snarling oven.

Hannibal did not pause in his chopping, his attention fixed on finely slicing red chilies with a wicked knife. “Our boundaries began blurred and never delineated. So when we step forward, there exists no line of ethics to step over.”

“It’s not a waltz, Hannibal.”

The knife lifted and Hannibal stared up at him through his lashes. With measured steps he prowled forward, dragging branching shadows even as the knife glinted at his side. Will couldn’t move when Hannibal stopped close, lips parted as if waiting for something. Will frowned, confused, and Hannibal jerked away, turning until all Will could see was his back flexing under linen. He slipped the knife into the sink and began to wash his hands.

Concerned, Will reached out to brush against Hannibal’s shoulder blade, his mouth opening around a question. Hannibal inhaled sharply and he froze.

Something clicked and his hands shook. “I don’t touch you,” Will whispered, stumbling back.

Whatever Hannibal had expected him to say, this was apparently not it. The silence pulled at Hannibal’s jaw, angled enough for Will to see. “We have touched.”

“You touch me but I don’t return the favor.”

Will moved into his space, pushing through the void until he was nearly pressed against Hannibal’s back, until he could feel the heat of Hannibal bleed through their clothing. They were already intimate – was this so different?

Lowering his hand on Hannibal’s shoulder was difficult when it kept shaking. Then contact was made, and it suddenly wasn’t difficult. He pushed at firm muscle and bone, guiding the other man to face him. The distance, or lack thereof, stayed the same, and Will kept his hand snaked around the doctor’s shoulder.

Hannibal regarded him with eyes as soft as soil. Will didn’t need to wonder to know what monster lurked beneath.

“Do you *want* me?” Will’s eyes fluttered downwards to stare at the handle of his knife and for a moment imagined it powder blue. “Oh,” he murmured, half stunned by the realization. “Of course you do. You’re like the moon – you too like broken things.”

“I like you,” Hannibal rumbled, almost as if he was correcting Will and not agreeing with him being a broken thing. “And I want – ”

“May I?” he interrupted, taking a hold of Hannibal’s hand, because suddenly he *saw*.

“Always,” promised Hannibal.

Will trembled at that. At the truth behind it. Raising the hand to his face he kissed Hannibal’s knuckles, the underside of his jaw. The space below his ear, the proud edge of his cheekbone. All through this Hannibal remained still as death, his eyes closed and his lips slightly parted. Will dragged his hands through sable hair, wondering what it would be like to wash it, to feel its strands run like quicksilver through his fingers. To hold that skull between his hands, to squeeze it and let it go. He inclined Hannibal’s head and kissed his eyelids, one at a time. Hannibal’s breathing sounded ragged, but the loudness was just an illusion of their proximity; Will knew if he were to pull back his breath would sound steady and unchanged. With eyes closed and heart quaking he paused, scant inches from parted lips.

"Am I cognizant enough for you now?"

He pulled back. Hannibal let him. Eyes on Hannibal’s Windsor knot, Will licked his lips, razor-sharp hurt fluttering in his chest, and turned away. He wasn't wanted. He misread it all. And crap - he'd kissed the greatest serial killer of all time. Hannibal observed as a puppeteer did; he was so *stupid* to even consider he could be some twenty dollar whore shimmying his hips up the puppet wire just to string along a cannibal's heart and mind with anything but blood. He wasn't wanted he wasn't needed he wasn't—

The wall was unyielding and cruel as Will was thrust against it. Shoving talons cracked his shoulders against plaster, and before he squeezed his eyes shut he glimpsed a glint of steel. He gasped, his ribs compressed – *this is it, this is death* – but then he realized the steel he’d seen was really bared teeth now moving against his own, that Hannibal was kissing him, and that kiss was life. Cruel and beautiful.

Surging forward, he molded himself against Hannibal, hooking his hands around him just to pull them closer. In return, Hannibal clutched him tighter against the wall, tugging at his curls and hips, wedged until his feet barely touched solid ground. He kissed Will into that wall, hard and animalistic, like he had no control. Sloppy, worshipful. Will gripped him tight, keeping that connection, and bit back best he could.

In a flash the air pricked at his skin, Hannibal withdrawing enough to rip the buttons from Will’s shirt. The blue cloth was tugged down just enough to trap Will’s arms behind his back; deprived of his hands Will arched into Hannibal.

Hannibal moved as if he were afraid that at any moment Will would disappear from him. He sucked marks over his chest, his neck, his jagged teeth worrying the meaty flesh of Will’s shoulders. Will took the opportunity to breathe, and did so in ragged gasps, heart thudding at

the sight of a cannibal in his kitchen decorating his skin in purpling roses. Wriggling free from the confines of his shirt, Will shoved at Hannibal, ineffectual until he dragged his hands through graying locks and *pulled*.

Soft brown eyes avoided his own. With hands calmer than his heart Will tugged until Hannibal's convulsing throat rested below his own blunt teeth. He scraped his tongue over the grained skin, tasting salt and aftershave. Drawing in a shuddering breath, he guided Hannibal's left hand to his crotch. His cock was hard, had been hard from the moment he had first touched the doctor's hand.

Hannibal gasped, his throat fluttering under Will's tongue. "Are you sure?" he rasped.

Will fell into the crook of Hannibal's neck.

"No," he said, honesty pricking his eyes. "I'm sure of so little. Which way to turn."

"So follow me. Let me be your gauge."

"*Yes*."

Will followed Hannibal's straight, measured footsteps into the master bedroom. He paused at the threshold, a vague sense of déjà vu clouding his mind. Hannibal glanced back at him and offered a calm expression. Will chuckled in return and pushed his hair back from his face. He sidestepped Hannibal and lowered onto the bed, which was made in vivid red and silken black. He stared at Hannibal's hips.

"I want to see you bare."

In response, Hannibal plucked undone his buttons and hung his shirts. He unbuckled his belt with calm eyes resting on Will and unzipped without a pause. Tight black briefs broke the golden expanse of skin, until those too were shed, folded atop the drawers with his trousers.

Feeling overdressed, Will tugged at his jacket, his shirt flapping uselessly from where it was torn down the middle. Suddenly his fingers crumpled his pocket. Smiling, he withdrew the origami swan and placed it on the bedside table.

"May I?" Hannibal asked, bending from the waist to catch his fingers against Will's collar.

Nodding, Will stared at the fine dusting of hair along Hannibal's collarbone as Hannibal undressed him.

"Lift."

Looping his arms around Hannibal's neck, their foreheads touching, Will raised his hips and his boxers slid off with his trousers. His cock sprang free, swaying in the fresh air. Hannibal's penis was different. It stood proud from a thatch of hair, long and slender, the head poking out from his foreskin. Curious, Will reached out and sheathed his therapist's cock, and revealed it, fascinated. A pearly bead welled at its tip, and when he touched it, the fluid stuck to his finger and strung out in a line until he purposefully broke it.

Hannibal pushed him into the bed until he straddled him, coarse hair tickling at his thighs. Then he rolled them until Will was the one parting Hannibal's legs against the covers.

With careful movements Hannibal placed Will's hands around his neck. "You can do it, right now," he urged, and his words vibrated into Will's hands.

Will stared into black eyes. "*Yes*," he agreed. "But I won't."

Hannibal shifted until Will's length scraped along tight balls. Until their lips nearly touched. "You still dream of killing me?"

"I don't think I'll ever stop," he admitted.

"What's stopping you now?"

Will squeezed curiously, feeling Hannibal's trachea. He pushed until he could feel the isthmus of the thyroid gland. Until he could feel Hannibal's smile curve sweetly under his lips. He pitched forward, air gushing from his chest as if he were the one being strangled, his fingers falling lax from the warm neck. Hannibal's breathing barely changed as he began to nuzzle into his neck.

Will shivered at the tickle of Hannibal's stubble. "You," he said, "have a pathological need to control me. Your imploring me to kill you will always result in you being the victor."

"You desire balance because you believe that will make me vulnerable." Hannibal drew Will's earlobe between his teeth and sucked on it.

"No, you already are vulnerable. I desire balance because it offers me strength."

Still, as Hannibal writhed gentle kisses around his neck Will felt like giving Hannibal a little more control.

"You're not like the others," Will admitted. "The people the woman killed," he clarified, and felt Hannibal's cock twitch. "Jeez. We have terrible bedroom talk."

Hannibal kissed his temple briefly. "I've been told my bedside manner is very soothing," he quipped.

Will chuckled at that, and he was pleased to see Hannibal huff in amusement, a smile curling into the doctor's lips.

"Oh god, please," Will wheezed. "No playing doctors. Can we just agree not to murder each other during sex?"

"Sex," Hannibal repeated, a thin line appearing between his brows. Will reached out and brushed it away.

"Possibly inappropriate to sheath anything but the meat dagger," he advised, then felt a grin leap onto his face. Hannibal chased after it, pouncing on his lips and tearing at them until

they swelled raw. “Hmm. Y’know what I mean, right? Struggle snuggling. You know, fucking.”

“Will,” Hannibal admonished, sounding pained.

Will’s belly flopped as he found himself flipped, Hannibal now above him with fire in his cheeks.

“Why would I kill you,” he purred, “when I can watch you scream? Why spill it when your blood rushes so beautifully under your skin? When your pulse pounds so sweetly here?” Hannibal reached down and Will cried out as his erection was grasped in a dry hand. “There shall be death in this bed, dear William, but only a little one.”

“Fuck.”

“Several, hopefully,” Hannibal amended after an amused pause. “How’s your French?”

“Yeah, I got the reference, thanks.” The little death – orgasm. He rolled his eyes at Hannibal’s love of wordplay. Fuck puns.

« Etes-tu prêt pour votre petite mort?* »

Will rolled his hips into Hannibal’s grasp. “Um, oui?”

Hannibal’s body was warm and balanced when he laid on him. Larger, heavier, and Will felt his breathing quicken as the other man’s cock rested against his own. It wasn’t uncomfortable – just different. Just what did Hannibal want?

For now, the doctor seemed content traversing his body with his mouth, and Will smothered a laugh at the man’s oral fixation.

Then Hannibal swallowed him whole, to the root, and Will suddenly didn’t feel like laughing any more.

Hannibal had a generous mouth, his technique surprisingly untamed for a man who color coded his coffee and alphabetized his spoons. His lips dragged over Will’s length not so much as to provide Will pleasure but to taste every inch and to consume all he could.

A cannibal was lathing his cock sloppily, freely, and all Will could think of was how much he didn’t deserve this. He deserved *nothing*. Not this worship, not the heat, the teeth and the soft-strong way that Hannibal palmed his balls. He buried one hand into Hannibal’s hair and the other into his own face, feeling heat prickle at this eyes and throat. He pushed Hannibal down further and held him there, feeling that smooth slide of throat and the slight scrape of teeth, and choked out a sob.

Hannibal disengaged from his cock long enough to moisten a slender finger. Will didn’t see it, but he felt it as it dragged cool moisture around his rim. He bucked, startled, and Hannibal choked slightly. Embarrassed, he stilled his thrusts in an attempt to be more courteous – but of course Hannibal took that moment to swipe clever fingers over his hole. Sweat dripped from his forehead as Hannibal pressed against that most intimate place, teasing until Will was

no longer trying to flinch away. Seemingly satisfied, Hannibal withdrew from his cock once more, licking his wet and reddened lips.

“Did Jason penetrate you?”

Will made an incoherent noise, then coughed. “Jealous much?”

Hannibal’s shoulders adopted an unimpressed slant. Will sighed.

“No. I don’t think so.”

“Then I shall take the appropriate care to prepare you.”

Will’s knees were kissed, one and two, and held to his chest by two gentle but firm hands. When the fair head disappeared beneath his exposed body, Will was left to wonder for a second before a hot tongue flicked against his entrance. This time Will couldn’t help the cry that tore from his throat, that kept tearing from his throat with every explorative lick. Sharp teeth worried his rim and bit cruelly into the flesh of his ass. Until finally, *finally* he was breached, a pointed tongue wriggling inside. Will began thrashing in earnest, overwhelmed and mind lust-fogged. And—

Cold air.

Will lowered his legs slowly, opening his eyes with a sinking heart. Apart from him the bed was empty. Shivering, he cast about with blood roaring in his ears, body bare and hands clutching at the bedspread. He looked for a weapon, considered the lamp on the nightstand, the soft silken sheets. Considered a plan of attack, depending on how Hannibal might pounce, and drew his hands into fists but moved no more than this. By degrees his mind quietened until he could hear the gentle running of a tap from a nearby bathroom. A precious minute dragged past until Hannibal reemerged before him, his chest heaving and face flushed.

Will scooted back on the bed as Hannibal prowled towards him, long limbs eating up the scarce ground between them. Strong arms and legs caged him; quirking an eyebrow, Will rose to kiss him full on the mouth.

Hannibal pulled back reluctantly. A lid clicked, then a gentle sweetness bloomed into the air. With one hand pushing Will’s knee back towards his chest and another at poised at his entrance, Hannibal’s eyes sought his as he penetrated him.

“Clench around my finger, Will. Good. Just like that.”

It wasn’t hard. He was tense enough, so he focused every line and concern until there was nothing in the world but Hannibal’s finger. He thought of Georgia Madchen, Abigail and Beverly. All the people he had wanted to save, protect –

“And relax.”

Will’s legs spread loose and Hannibal’s finger slid all the way in, long and foreign. Then it crooked towards his belly and Will jumped like a livewire.

“Ha–”

“That would be your prostate. If I-” Hannibal adjusted slightly and hit it again.

Will fell backwards in a wave of pleasure. *Oh.* Pushing both knees to his chest, Hannibal stretched him carefully, penetration sloppy and easy at this angle.

Gradually, Will became aware of Hannibal murmuring words in his native tongue. He tried to grab hold of the curves of the words, imagining the form they might wreak so that he might look them up later, even as they crawled over his neck and slipped into his spine until he was left all but gasping out his own.

“Ha-*Hannibal.”*

He clutched at Hannibal, trying to pull the man over him, into him; over him, Hannibal moved enough to kiss his knees and then his lips. Will bit at them, pleased when he tasted blood.

“Now,” he commanded, and Hannibal’s lips curved amused.

“As you wish.”

Will screamed as Hannibal sunk down. Not into him, as he expected, but Will into Hannibal. The doctor’s face barely changed as he took Will’s cock into his tight, slicked channel. Will clawed at Hannibal’s chest, weaving his fingers through the iron fuzz as he stamped down the instinct to *mate claim fuck.* Then he moaned at the image of Hannibal preparing himself in the bathroom, fingers furtive and desperate as he shoved enough lube and girth to make the penetration possible. He twitched his hips upwards and was rewarded by a soft exhale across his cheek.

Hannibal began to ride him, slowly at first – both getting used to the feeling – then quickly, desperately. Will scraped his nails along Hannibal’s flexing thighs and gasped into a slick mouth. Too soon he felt his balls tighten and his blood swim.

“Hannibal,” he growled, his hands trying to stall the man’s hips even as he continued to thrust blindly.

Hannibal kissed his growl and matched it with his own. “I want you to come now, Will. Come in me.”

“Fuck,” Will gasped, their hips snapping together. “Mine.”

He cried out long and pained, his body snapping tight and relaxing soft. White light bled behind his eyes, and he cleaved to Hannibal, so tightly he felt like he was holding himself.

Hannibal stroked him through his orgasm, brushing gentle hands along his cheek and through his hair. He cradled Will’s face into his chest and only then did he rise gently from Will’s spent length.

Will had a moment to deal with the afterglow before he was met with the pillow, flipped over onto his belly. He took a moment to wonder at Hannibal's strength before swearing as the man wedged himself between his legs. The beautiful beast rutted along his crevice until his cockhead caught on his hole, and he shoved it in.

Will cursed and moaned, sensitive but otherwise loose – all other reservations melted with his orgasm. He laid there, letting Hannibal do the work, letting Hannibal hold him close as he fucked into him. Let him hold his hands against Will's stomach as he thrust deep into him. Made love to him. His nails dug in, just sharp enough to cut. Then those hands were soft again, smoothing away the sting.

Hannibal dragged his mouth over every reachable inch of him, tasting him, consuming him. Getting a bellyful of Will Graham while giving Will Graham a bellyful. Will huffed out a laugh, which Hannibal answered with a sharp, twisting thrust into his prostate.

Hannibal gave and kept on giving until there remained between them no seams. It wasn't love – at least, not as he understood it. It was more than the mending of the shattered things, the broken strings – it was being one. It was being whole.

Will swore.

He was falling, falling over that precipice, hot breath that ran along his moistened neck becoming an ocean breeze.

He arched his back with the intention of watching Hannibal come undone, but almost immediately nails dug into his scalp and shoved his face into the pillow. He yelped at the pain of being wrenched and Hannibal pulled back enough to stroke his curls. Hannibal came silently, his hands clutching and shaking as his cock convulsed to mark Will from within. Will came too then against the mattress, unexpected, untouched and dry.

He punched out breaths of adrenaline, still falling, but enjoying the view nonetheless. He turned enough to smile at Hannibal's hair struck silver in the lamplight, brown eyes lax and mouth open in exaltation.

Falling was strange – he felt both suspended and cut, and tears welled in his eyes. He let the wet fall and wondered when the fall would stop. Since he was already a broken thing, he wondered how readily he might shatter upon impact. Or perhaps he would be stronger for it.

Will Graham fell and kept on falling, until he knew he was never to stop.

Hannibal crushed his chest, landing flat on him, still inside, and ribboned shaking hands through Will's curls. Everything that was Will – his hands, his chest, his legs, his nose – was touching Hannibal, until Hannibal was all there was. He quivered out a smile when he realized Hannibal owned more still.

Blinking, Will shuddered out a smile and looked behind Hannibal's sharp cheekbones. The black swan stared at him, and he stared back.

“Penny for your thoughts, Will?” asked Hannibal, because of course he could be coherent in a time like this. The Wendigo withdrew and Will winced.

“I feel like I’m falling,” he admitted slowly, and breathed in haltingly, lungs weighed down by Hannibal’s body. “You’re not smoke, or even the devil. You’re air. Poised between life and death, I drag you over my teeth and breathe you in. And yet...”

Will reached for the swan and placed it in Hannibal’s generous mouth. “You consume me.”

Hannibal had never looked more pleased. His eyes shone dark and wet as he closed his lips around tiny wings, chewing and consuming the swan. He swallowed thickly and returned to nuzzle at Will’s cheek, to nibble at his ears.

He trembled.

“I consume you?”

Will hummed.

The thought crossed him as he ran his hands along Hannibal’s rib cage. That if he cracked open these ribs and reached inside to stay that heart, to kill Hannibal, maybe that would be nice. But he knew the heart would never stop pounding, beating, that he would feel it for as long as it he held it. For a moment Will entertained the impossible notion of Hannibal falling with him. Unattainable though it was, Will cleaved to that fantasy, gripping his monster tight, falling toward the darkness of sleep just like that.

“It’s funny,” Hannibal murmured, and at these words Will wondered if Hannibal would fall with him. Hannibal’s hands swallowed him as he cradled Will’s head to his chest, until Will’s eyes grew heavy at the steady ache of the Wendigo’s beating heart. And this, *this* was the moment he became grounded, shattered, never to be made whole again.

“I was thinking the same of you, Will.”

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